The Big Break:

Race and Gender in Pawnee Bill's Historic Wild West, 1888-1913

By

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A thesis submitted to the graduate faculty

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS IN HISTORY

University of Central Oklahoma

Spring 2013

THESIS APPROVAL

The abstract and thesis of Alyce Vigil for the Master of Arts in History was submitted to the graduate college on March 29, 2013, and approved by the undersigned committee.

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Abstract

Wild West shows such as that organized by Gordon William "Pawnee Bill" Lillie were the national pastime of America, and endeavored to teach Euro-Americans about life on the western frontier. Pawnee Bill's traveling show was a large, complicated, and dangerous operation due to turn-of-the-century railroad travel and the difficulties of performing with wild animals. For the early cowgirls, American Indian women, and Georgians, employment in Pawnee Bill's Historic Wild West meant societal, cultural, and economic opportunity. The early cowgirls pushed the boundaries of society by their riding style, dress, and new pastimes. Despite stereotypical portrayals as "squaws" or "princesses," participation in the Wild West shows let American Indian women preserve their traditional way of life, escape the reservations, and keep their children with them and out of the boarding schools. Show organizers falsely billed the Georgian riders as "Russian Cossacks," but they nonetheless earned more money with an American tent show than they could in their civil war-torn country, and took it home to help feed their families. For these three groups, employment in Pawnee Bill's Historic Wild West was their "big break;" their chance to make their lives a little better.

Acknowledgments

I would first like to thank the University of Central Oklahoma (UCO) Department of History and Geography for conference support, thereby allowing me to hear the thoughts of others in my field. I would also like to thank UCO's Office of Research and Grants' Research, Creative, and Scholarly Activities (RSCA) grant that provided travel and research support for this thesis project. Your support and helpfulness is greatly appreciated.

A wonderful volunteer experience-turned-internship is to thank for my interest in this topic. I sincerely value the time I have spent volunteering and working at the Pawnee Bill Ranch and Museum in Pawnee, Oklahoma. Pawnee Bill attracted many fans during his life; the Ranch staff's work ensures that he continues to do so. Giving tours through the Lillie's historic mansion and being a small yet enthusiastic cast member in the annual recreation of Pawnee Bill's Wild West Show, held the last three Saturdays every June, has truly been a life-changing experience. Thanks to the many staff and cast members who have come and gone throughout my time there. You make every summer an adventure!

Finally, I would like to thank the individuals who helped me with this project. A colossal thank you to Dr. Patricia Loughlin: your counsel and encouragement proved instrumental to both the completion of this thesis and to the emerging professional I am today. Thank you to Heidi Vaughn and Dr. Mark Janzen for offering recommendations. Thank you to Erin Brown for pulling file boxes and always keeping the route books

handy. Thank you to Rebecca Morton for cheerfully ignoring the notecards and post-its on every available surface.

Donna Vigil and Kevin Webb: to you, I think, go the greatest thanks. I am forever indebted to you both for your constant and unconditional support. Mom, you taught me to love reading and writing; Kevin, you taught me to love the Ranch. This thesis is for you.

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Introduction

Gordon William "Pawnee Bill" Lillie (1860-1942) was a Wild West showman. Born in Illinois, he moved with his family to Kansas at the age of twelve. When the US federal government relocated the Pawnee tribe from their homeland in Nebraska to Indian Territory (present-day Oklahoma) in 1874, the tribe made their winter camp outside Wellington, and young Lillie spent all his time there. Blue Hawk, a Pawnee man, befriended him, and this friendship eventually motivated Lillie to move to Pawnee, Oklahoma, where he worked closely with the Pawnee tribe. When William Frederick "Buffalo Bill" Cody (1846-1917) hired some Pawnee to perform in his new Wild West, Lillie, now called "Pawnee Bill," joined Cody's crew as a Pawnee interpreter for two years beginning in 1886. Inspired, Pawnee Bill created his own enterprise in 1888. His wife, May Manning Lillie (1869-1936), starred in his show as a sharpshooter. Lillie's show toured the eastern seaboard every year from 1888-1913 and Europe in 1895. In 1909, Lillie joined his show with Cody's to create "Buffalo Bill's Wild West and Pawnee Bill's Great Far East Combined," commonly called the Two Bills Show, which closed in 1913. Lillie retired to his bison ranch in Pawnee, but not from public life. He founded a film company, an oil company, continued to be active in the Episcopal Church, the Freemasons, and the boards of many area businesses such as the local school and bank.

Wild West shows were the unofficial national entertainment of the United States from the 1880s to the 1910s, and attempted to teach Euro-Americans about life on the western frontier. Academicians have written much regarding Buffalo Bill Cody and his show, the first of these enterprises. These scholars, however, have largely neglected

Pawnee Bill's show. We cannot truly understand Wild West shows unless we explore more than one incarnation of it. Similarly, we cannot truly understand any one Wild West show unless we explore all of its participants—not only the Euro-American men, but also men and women of ethnic minorities whose voices have so far remained silent.

Throughout the following research project, I use many terms to describe various groups, which warrant definition. I use the phrase "Euro-American" to denote the dominant, white, United States-based populace that originated in and identify with Western Europe. I realize that perhaps not *all* of the individuals discussed at any one time fit into this mold, but the majority does. I use the terms "Native," "Native American," "American Indian," and "Indian" interchangeably to mean those of any tribe originating in the present-day United States (US). These seem to me the most-accurate and least offensive terms.

In the use of the term "show" when referring to either Buffalo Bill's or Pawnee Bill's Wild West, I am consciously choosing *not* to be historically accurate. Both Cody and Lillie shunned the word "show," thinking it led the public to believe the events and skills portrayed in their enterprises were exaggerated or worse, completely false. They preferred words like "truthfulness" and "authentic," holding that these events, as seen in the arena, were completely real. I add the word "show" to illustrate my insistence that these events were not perfectly accurate; they were skewed in the favor of male Euro-Americans. In addition, the enterprise was foremost for entertainment purposes, further justifying my use of the word.

Furthermore, I would like to acknowledge that I am being postmodernist in my epistemological approach. Because the women discussed in the following chapters did

not leave records of their own, and the Euro-American men who originally created the records now housed in archives often excluded women—especially women of ethnic minorities—researchers are left to fill in the gaps. Sometimes, we cannot know how these people felt or the exact actions they took, but I am making an educated guess based on the available sources.

The first historiographical chapter of this project discusses not only the sources contemporary with Gordon Lillie, but also those regarding the image of the American West, Wild West shows themselves, and American Indian, Georgian, and Euro-American female performers. The second chapter details the logistics of the show and the imperialistic image of the American West it offered eastern audiences. The third chapter offers a brief biography of May Lillie in addition to discussing the early cowgirls. The fourth chapter explores the experiences of American Indian women along the show route, in addition to how they maintained their traditions in a changing time. The final chapter details the contributions of the Georgian riders, both male and female. Throughout this discussion the reader will discover how, for these three marginalized groups—Euro-American women, American Indian women, and Georgian men and women—employment in Pawnee Bill's Historic Wild West was their "big break;" their chance to make their lives a little better. Working in the show meant opportunity, whether social, as it was for the early cowgirls, cultural, for American Indian women, or economic, in the case of the Georgians.

Historiographical Essay:

Contemporary Portrayals, Wild West Shows, Female Performers, Show Indians, Western Imagery, and Georgian Riders

"Well-behaved women seldom make history."

- Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, women's historian, 1976.

Wild West showman Gordon William "Pawnee Bill" Lillie was born in Illinois, but eventually moved to Pawnee, Oklahoma, where he worked closely with the Pawnee tribe. Lillie went on tour with the first Wild West performance organized by William Frederick "Buffalo Bill" Cody for two years beginning in 1886 as a Pawnee interpreter. Inspired, he created his own enterprise in 1888. Lillie's show toured Europe in 1895 and the eastern seaboard every year from 1888-1913. Wild West shows were the unofficial national entertainment of the US and attempted to teach Euro-Americans about life on the western frontier. As an important part of life in the West, not to mention that they fascinated eastern white audiences, the show depended on Native Americans to portray the West and to sell tickets. Beginning in 1900, Pawnee Bill began including "eastern" acts in his show programs, and one of the most popular was the Georgian riders, inappropriately billed as "Russian Cossacks." The inclusion of eastern acts culminated in 1909 when Lillie joined his show with Cody's to create "Buffalo Bill's Wild West and Pawnee Bill's Great Far East Combined," commonly called the Two Bills Show. The public was captivated throughout it all. Then as now, books and articles abound that focus on the spectacle of these enterprises.[1]

In order to understand race and gender within Wild West shows, the researcher must explore many different lines of historical inquiry. In the following historiographical discussion, I will broadly traverse these themes before narrowing my focus within each: sources contemporary to the show, Pawnee Bill's biography, Wild West shows, Show Indians, American Western imagery, and Georgian riders. I will focus first on the sources contemporary to Pawnee Bill's Historical Wild West, including newspapers, dime novels,

[1] Paul Reddin, *Wild West Shows* (Chicago, University of Illinois Press, 1999); Louis Warren, *Buffalo Bill's America* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005).

and route books.[2] The sole and therefore seminal biography of Pawnee Bill will round out this section of "glorifying" sources.[3] Second, I seek to place Wild West show imagery in this continuum, while discussing what kind of attention—if, indeed, any—the authors afford to female performers and how they discuss gender in general. Sarah Wood-Clark's *Beautiful Daring Western Girls* (no year given) is a tremendous beginning, but academic texts have oddly overlooked the topic of early cowgirls, despite a wealth of primary source material.[4] Third, a discussion of works about the so-called "Show Indians," will follow. This discussion draws heavily from L.G. Moses' *Wild West Shows and the Images of American Indians* (1996), the first to focus on this topic.[5] Fourth, I will discuss the broad image of the American West as portrayed in Wild West shows. Finally, I will review the literature on Georgian riders in the show. By far the most inclusive text in terms of gender on this topic is Makaradze and Chkhaidze's *Wild West Georgians*

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[2] *1910 Program*: *Buffalo Bill Bids You Good Bye: The Wild West and Far East,* (New York and Cincinnati: I.M. Southern & Co. Publishers, 1910); Lloyd F. Nicodemus and Harry G. Wilson, *Season 1901 Official Route Book of the Pawnee Bill Wild West Show (*no publication information given, 1901); Arnold Scout, *Pawnee Bill in Oklahoma, or Fighting with the White Chief,* Pluck and Luck: Complete Stories of Adventure Series, (New York: Frank Tousey Company, 1906); A.G. Shaw, *Official Route Book of Pawnee Bill's Historical Wild West and Mexican Hippodrome*, (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania: Barrington & Co., Printers, 1895); H. G. Wilson, *Official Route Book of the Pawnee Bill Wild West Show, Season 1899* (Piqua, Ohio: Correspondent Show Printing House, 1898); H. G. Wilson, *Official Route Book of the Pawnee Bill Wild West Show, Season 1899* (Newport, Kentucky: The Donaldson Lithograph Co., 1899); Harry (H.G.) Wilson and Lloyd F. Nicodemus, *Official Route Book of the Pawnee Bill Wild West Show, Season 1900* (Chicago: F.T. Peterson Co., 1900.

Newspapers include but are hardly limited to *New York Times,* 1895, 1897; "At the Theatres," *Saint Paul Globe* (MN), 26 June 1901; "Pawnee Bill's Indian Show," *Shenandoah Herald* (Woodstock, VA),19 September 1890; ""Fire Water" at the Union Station," *St. Louis Republic* (MO), 2 November 1903; "The Peabody Fair," *Wichita Eagle* (KS), 23 August 1887.

[3] Glenn Shirley, *Pawnee Bill: A Biography of Major Gordon W. Lillie* (Albuquerque, University of New Mexico Press, 1958), 115-147.

[4] Sarah Wood-Clark, *Beautiful Daring Western Girls: Women of the Wild West Shows* (Cody, WY: Buffalo Bill Historical Center, no publication year given).

[5] L. G. Moses, *Wild West Shows and the Images of American Indians, 1883-1933 (*Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1996).

(2001)[6]. Through this discourse, I will illustrate the many marginalizations that have occurred in academic literature: scholars rarely even mention Pawnee Bill's Historic Wild West, and women (especially those of a racial minority) and the discussion of gender are vital elements in Wild West shows that have thus far been largely overlooked. The authors who do so are usually writing for a popular audience, and while rich sources in their own right, are not primarily concerned with scholarly writing. Therefore, I seek to contribute to the academic field of Wild West shows by offering a discussion and analysis of race and gender, two customarily disregarded classifications, in an essentially unnoticed institution, Pawnee Bill's Historic Wild West.

The first medium to report on Lillie and his show was, appropriately, newspapers. Newspaper accounts of the day advertised Pawnee Bill's Historic Wild West—and often glorified it. Not always accurate, these articles often mislabeled the show as an "Indian Encampment" or "Indian Museum." Reporters and readers were always exceedingly interested in the American Indians in the show; several examples exist of large stories devoted to them, whereas sometimes the advertising for the show itself was only a few lines. These stories did not always portray Native Americans in a positive light. For every article about a celebration of a birth or pleasure trip, another one appeared detailing drunkenness and subsequent arrest. Georgians received less press than American Indians. When newspapermen did discuss them, however, they always did so in laudatory phrases about their excellent and exciting riding. Newspapers rarely noticed women, and of these

[6] Irakli Makharadze and Akaki Chkhaidze, *Wild West Georgians* (Tbilisi: New Media Tbilisi, 2001).

rare occurrences only the white women, or the "beautiful daring western girls," as the show organizers touted the early cowgirls, received press.[7]

The dime novel was likely the most popular and easily-accessed medium to discuss Lillie. In the heyday of the dime novel era (c. 1860-90), eastern publishing companies created thousands of such works and often competed fiercely with one another. These series always portrayed the West as a larger-than-life place full of adventure, where anything could happen. Quite stereotypical in regards to race and gender, they portrayed Euro-American men as the heroes, Native Americans as either noble or ignoble savages, and women as either helpmates who often required rescuing or (much less often) sharpshooters who, nonetheless, never lost their femininity. Dime novels especially glorified the main (white male) character, often Buffalo Bill or Pawnee Bill, and his supposed or exaggerated exploits, such as in Arnold Scout's 1906 dime novel *Pawnee Bill in Oklahoma, or Fighting with the White Chief*, part of the Pluck and Luck: Complete Stories of Adventure Series. Authors meant these tales for mere entertainment value, but people in the East took it seriously and believed that these heroes really could outride the wind, shoot two men with a single bullet, and other daring yet outrageously unlikely acts.[8]

The final contemporary media was the route book, a detailed journal of the shows' travels and the casts' daily lives on the road taken by a show administrator every year and published at the end of the season, intended as souvenirs for show audiences.

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[7] Newspapers include but are hardly limited to *New York Times*, 1895, 1897; "At the Theatres," *Saint Paul Globe* (MN), 26 June 1901; "Pawnee Bill's Indian Show," *Shenandoah Herald* (Woodstock, VA), 19 September 1890; ""Fire Water" at the Union Station," *St. Louis Republic* (MO), 2 November 1903; "The Peabody Fair," *Wichita Eagle* (KS), 23 August 1887.

[8] Scout, *Pawnee Bill in Oklahoma, or Fighting with the White Chief* .

Harry Wilson and Lloyd F. Nicodemus were the two most frequent authors. These route books are an invaluable source as they give much information: cast lists, the enumeration of acts in the show, the relative audience size, battles fought, friendships forged, jokes played, food eaten, side trips enjoyed, births, and injuries of the cast and crew. While discussing the acts and the various ethnic groups involved, the authors use laudatory language and glorify the show and its participants. The daily entries tend to take on a drily joking tone. At the beginning of most route books was a biography of "Major" Lillie, the stage name he took, perhaps to compete with Colonel William Cody. The biography in the route books always glorified his exploits, such as leading a group of Boomers to settle present-day Oklahoma.[9]

The seminal biography of Gordon Lillie was written in 1958 by Glenn Shirley, a Stillwater resident, campus police officer, and self-taught historian who wrote many biographies of lawmen and outlaws of the Old West. The works at the beginning of his thirty-year writing career were lacking in what historians today deem serious scholarship. He wrote *Pawnee Bill: A Biography of Major Gordon W. Lillie* (1958) early in his career and it lacks an introduction, preface, historiographical essay, and references. Not without its merits, the text provides several good quotes from Lillie himself, although they lack citations. Some chapters, such as "The Land Boomer" and "Pawnee Bill's Historical

[9] *1910 Program*: *Buffalo Bill Bids You Good Bye: The Wild West and Far East,* (New York and Cincinnati: I.M. Southern & Co. Publishers, 1910); Lloyd F. Nicodemus and Harry G. Wilson, *Season 1901 Official Route Book of the Pawnee Bill Wild West Show (*no publication information given, 1901); A.G. Shaw, *Official Route Book of Pawnee Bill's Historical Wild West and Mexican Hippodrome*, (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania: Barrington & Co., Printers, 1895); H. G. Wilson, *Official Route Book of the Pawnee Bill Wild West Show, Season 1899* (Piqua, Ohio: Correspondent Show Printing House, 1898); H. G. Wilson, *Official Route Book of the Pawnee Bill Wild West Show, Season 1899* (Newport, Kentucky: The Donaldson Lithograph Co., 1899); Harry (H.G.) Wilson and Lloyd F. Nicodemus, *Official Route Book of the Pawnee Bill Wild West Show, Season 1900* (Chicago: F.T. Peterson Co., 1900).

Wild West," for example, which discuss Gordon's courtship of May and the beginnings of his show, are factual.[10]

Overall, Shirley painted a grandiose portrait of the showman. According to Shirley's book, Lillie's life was a long series of one exciting adventure after another: not all of which actually happened. The tendency to exaggerate puts Shirley squarely within what we could call the "Glorifying School"—a body of writings that include early newspapers, dime novels, and route books, which elevates Lillie to the almost-mythical status as a hero of the plains.

Sarah Blackstone, whose book *Buckskins, Bullets, and Business* (1986) discussed Buffalo Bill's show in general, thereby moving away from glorifying a single man. She argued that even though Buffalo Bill's Wild West show claimed authenticity, it was not accurate. It, nevertheless, stamped a *myth* on the American and European consciousness. Blackstone's book sought to refute this myth using the show's own imagery. The discussion about the women involved in the show argued that the Wild West helped to introduce the idea of the "pioneer woman" as more than objects men needed to rescue. Strong characters such as Annie Oakley (1860-1926) and female bronc riders could do anything men could do, and sometimes do it better.[11]

Allen L. Farnum was the first to look at Pawnee Bill's Wild West show, although his was not an examining text but the publication of a photograph collection. He was not a professionally trained historian, nor did he pretend to be one. In the preface to *Pawnee Bill's Historic Wild West: A Photo Documentary of the 1900-1905 Show Tours* (1992),

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[10] Shirley, *Pawnee Bill*, 115-147.

[11] Sarah Blackstone, *Buckskins, Bullets, and Business* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1986), 129-30.

Farnum clearly stated his intentions and circumstances. The author's father, a professional photographer, received a collection of original photographs from the man who snapped them, Harry Bock, a crewmember of the show. The collection documents the show from 1900 to 1905 and offers many useful candid photographs. No one had done anything with the photos until the publication of *Pawnee Bill's Historic Wild West,* and Farnum merely wanted to get his unique collection of original photographs published so researchers could study them. His was a work of personal passion.[12]

One of the first professionally trained historians to discuss Wild West shows was Richard White. He is one of four founders of the New Western History school of thought, along with Patricia Limerick with whom he coauthored *The Frontier in American Culture* (1994). New Western History focuses on the shortcomings within Frederick Jackson Turner's landmark essay "The Significance of the Frontier in American History."

Historian Frederick Jackson Turner (1861-1932) was the most influential person to advocate for the importance of the Western experience to American history. In 1890, the US Census department declared the frontier closed as a geographic and demographic category. The frontier had previously given a moral compass to the concept of national expansion; what should Americans do now it was gone?[13] Turner's answer was study it. Turner was convinced that eastern historians were ignorant about anything beyond the Appalachian Mountains and he wanted to reorient the study of American History to reflect the whole of the US. In a career spanning the 1890s through the 1920s, he called

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[12] Allen L. Farnum, *Pawnee Bill's Historic Wild West: A Photo Documentary of the 1900-1905 Show Tours* (West Chester, PA: Schiffer Publishing Ltd., 1992), 4.

[13] Glen M. Mimura, "A Dying West?: Reimagining the Frontier in Frank Matsura's Photography, 1903-1913," *American Quarterly* 62, no. 3 (2010): 692.

for more study and attention to the west, hypothesizing since Euro-Americans moved from the east to the west, western affairs were of central importance to understanding the economic, political, and diplomatic affairs of the US. By the 1920s, this Frontier Thesis had won over many students of American History.[14] As the New Western Historians pointed out, however, the thesis had its flaws. It left out minorities and women, thereby characterizing Native Americans as obstacles to progress, and women as victims of it.[15]

In his essay entitled "Frederick Jackson Turner and Buffalo Bill," therefore, White uses archival imagery and secondary texts such as Turner's landmark essay. White compared Turner, Cody, and their respective messages, arguing that they both told popular, educational stories about the West, and that these stories were distinct and contradictory. Turner told a story about free land, where farmers heroically broke the land to their will with the plow and where Native Americans did not exist. In Cody's version, American Indians were vital, for the scout had to know their ways and overcome their culture. Each story, however, led to the same conclusion: the frontier closed. These two particular versions of the western story proved lasting because they were simple, straightforward, and made use of popular western icons and symbols, such as farmers, scouts, stagecoaches, and log cabins. Turner discussed them in his essay; Cody used them as stage props. White also held that Turner's West was homogenous, while Cody

[14] Richard W. Etulain, ed., "Introduction: The Rise of Western Historiography," in *Writing Western History: Essays on Major Western Historians* (Reno and Las Vegas: University of Nevada Press, 2002), 7, 12.

[15] Mimura, "A Dying West?" 692.

recognized diversity in the West, since he included Native Americans, Mexicans, and women in his show.[16]

Agreeing that Cody recognized diversity in the West was Paul Reddin. In *Wild West Shows* (1999), Reddin agrees with Richard White's "Frederick Jackson Turner and Buffalo Bill" that Buffalo Bill recognized diversity in the West by including Native Americans, Hispanics, blacks, and women.[17] I would argue, however, that mere inclusion in the show was not the same as truly recognizing diversity. Cody wanted to sell tickets and make money; he included Native Americans to take advantage of the public's enthrallment with them.

Wild West Shows puts the shows in a 100-year continuum—from 1830 to 1930—with George Catlin, the Miller Brothers, and Tom Mix. *Wild West Shows* firmly agrees with Sarah Blackstone's *Buckskins, Bullets, and Business*, as it argues that despite claims of accuracy, Buffalo Bill's Wild West presented a highly selective interpretation that (therefore) could be well-received by white American audiences.[18] For example, the Wild West shows portrayed Native Americans as the "bad guys" in most of the acts, such as battle reenactments when they took women hostage to torture them, or in the Attack on the Settler's Cabin, wherein Indians attacked a Euro-American family. The show traveled in the eastern US, a part of the country where the populace was convinced of the "savage" nature of American Indians.

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[16] Richard White, "Frederick Jackson Turner and Buffalo Bill," in *The Frontier in American Culture*, ed. James R. Grossman (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 6-65.

[17] Paul Reddin, *Wild West Shows* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1999).

[18] Ibid., 219-20.

The discussion of Wild West shows continued with popular author Michael Wallis, who tells the story of the 101 Ranch, a later Wild West show headquartered in Bliss (now Marland), Oklahoma, in the north-central part of the state. Wallis, although well read, well versed, and well published in history, was not trained professionally. In *The Real Wild West: The 101 Ranch and the Creation of the American West* (1999), Wallis describes the 101 Ranch in glorious, romantic language, and does not include many hard and fast facts within it. His chapter on Pawnee Bill takes its information almost exclusively from the tall tales of Glenn Shirley's biography. Wallis does devote a chapter to Lillian Smith (1871-1930), an American Indian female sharpshooter and great rival of Annie Oakley. Fortunately, this section shows much more research. The tone of the material as a whole, however, is romantic and seeks to glorify the 101 as a mythical cowboy haven. The book is a throwback to the adventure stories of dime novels and yet, since Wallis is such a popular writer, this image of the Wild West show is now widely available to the public.[19]

In a 2003 article, Louis S. Warren offered something much different to the interpretation of Wild West shows. In "Cody's Last Stand: Masculine Anxiety, the Culture Myth, and the Frontier of Domesticity in Buffalo Bill's Wild West (2003)," Warren disagreed drastically with previous interpretations. Warren argued that Buffalo Bill's Wild West show was more domestically oriented than previously assumed; it was not solely an imperialistic tale of Euro-American dominance over Native Americans. "Cody's Last Stand" is also especially important because it is one of the first sources to address directly the gender issue surrounding Wild West shows. Buffalo Bill often used

[19] Michael Wallis, *The Real Wild West: The 101 Ranch and the Creation of the American West* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999).

gendered imagery of masculinity in the protection of home and femininity in need of rescuing. The act in the show that most scholars point to when arguing for the imperialistic tone of the show—the "First Scalp for Custer," wherein Cody vengefully defeated Yellow Hair, the Native American chief who killed General George A. Custer at the Battle of Little Big Horn—was not frequently used. The most frequently used finale was the "Attack on the Settler's Cabin," wherein horseback natives almost rode down unhorsed (and therefore unmanned) white homesteaders, and consequently, symbolically attacked whiteness, family, and domesticity itself. Furthermore, Progressivism, with new ideas such as women's suffrage in 1869 Wyoming, was changing values and familial roles, and so the home-centered act spoke to the gender anxieties of the day.[20]

Warren also wrote a biography of Cody, *Buffalo Bill's America* (2005), a challenge to Don Russell's 1960 biography *Lives and Legends of Buffalo Bill*, which glorifies the showman. *Buffalo Bill's America* argues that Cody cannot be so easily deified or degraded; he was both a real hero and a lying showman. The text explores both Cody's real achievements and his many fabrications in order to understand how and why he mixed the two, instead of in an effort to categorize him.[21] Warren himself describes it as a book about "how a man crafted a life and a story to reflect and express one another."[22]

Warren also discusses race in *Buffalo Bill's America*. The arena performance portrayed Euro-Americans as the supreme race and bitter enemies with various ethnic

[20] Louis S. Warren, "Cody's Last Stand: Masculine Anxiety, the Culture Myth, and the Frontier of Domesticity in Buffalo Bill's Wild West," *Western Historical Quarterly* 34 (Spring 2003):49-69.

[21] Louis S. Warren, *Buffalo Bill's America: William Cody and the Wild West Show* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005), xi-xv.

[22] Ibid., xv.

groups, such as Native Americans and Mexicans. Behind the scenes, however, everyone interacted with and depended upon the others, to some degree. This was inevitable because of the sheer number of people involved; however, there were times when race relations broke down. For example, many cowboys believed Cody favored the American Indians, which sometimes led to ill feelings all around. Cody would rarely berate the Indians, instead turning his wrath on the cowboys. He did this most likely out of fear they would either report him to the Bureau of Indian Affairs, or would leave the show and not return.[23]

Although several sources mention the early Euro-American cowgirls, or, as they were originally known, "Rancheras" or "Beautiful Daring Western Girls," few focus on them, specifically, despite an overwhelming amount of primary source material and artifacts. While hardly a professionally published text (the author includes no citations and no publication year is given), Sarah Wood-Clark's *Beautiful Daring Western Girls: Women of the Wild West Shows* seeks to fill the serious lack in the literature, and for that it should be commended. Her text describes an exhibition at the Buffalo Bill Historical Center in Cody, Wyoming, and argues that early cowgirls were attracted to jobs in Wild West shows by the opportunities to work, travel with their husbands, and earn equal pay as the men. Two opposing images resulted in the media: that of the ultra-feminine "prairie flower" and the tough woman. Wood-Clark broached the issue of femininity—or lack thereof—with two issues: dress and riding style. Split skirts got shorter and when cowgirls added elastic to the bottom hems, the skirts morphed into bloomers. Women rode astride, shocking many audience members. The text further argues that

[23] Ibid., 397-9.

sharpshooters such as Annie Oakley, Lillian Smith, and May Lillie caught the public's eye and helped ease other women into the programs. The Quadrille on Horseback was a crowd favorite and included women from the start, and by the mid-1890s, women began to perform as bronc riders, trick riders, and ropers.[24]

Another historian to focus on the contributions and legacy of cowgirls was Glenda Riley. In her seminal biography *The Life and Legacy of Annie Oakley,* Riley discussed the life of the famous sharpshooter. She argues Oakley was so successful not only because of her talent, but because of her conscious decision and many efforts to remain a proper Victorian lady. Oakley's husband, Frank Butler, was ten years her senior and already an experienced showman when they married, so the couple knew how to carefully craft Oakley's public persona. Although she performed in a man's role, outshooting many of her male contemporaries, she clung to the concept of Victorian femininity. She always wore long, full skirts, always rode sidesaddle, and played up her girlish, petite figure and long brown hair. People loved her because she was a *lady* shooter, not merely a talented sharpshooter.[25]

Providing a solid overview of the ways in which early cowgirls pushed the boundaries of Victorian society is historian Renee Laegreid, who focused on rodeo cowgirls in *Riding Pretty* (2006). In the late 1920s, rodeo emerged as an official sport, and women soon entered the lists as riders, ropers, and rodeo queens. Laegreid builds on Riley's work by arguing that these middle-class women began to move outside their domestic spheres, but still maintained their femininity. Early cowgirls stayed feminine in

[24] Wood-Clark, *Beautiful Daring Western Girls*, 18-19.

[25] Glenda Riley, *The Life and Legacy of Annie Oakley* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1994), 17, 21.

a man's sport by both meeting and contradicting acceptable gender roles. For example, even though they could often outride men, they were careful to keep a girlish appearance. As riding styles shifted from sidesaddle to astride, their clothes had to change, as well, from full skirts to split skirts, and then bloomers. Early cowgirls tailored their own clothes, however, and were careful to choose good fabrics, bright colors, girlish cuts, and to utilize fancy embroidery to keep their costumes feminine.[26]

Now that we have explored the literature about the Wild West shows, the image of the West, and texts focused on women and gender, let us turn to the existent works regarding American Indians and "Show Indians," the term used to describe Native Americans who traveled and performed with Wild West shows. By the late 1990s, texts written by American Indians about American Indian issues enter the scholarly literature and can provide an invaluable framework for the concerned historian sensitive to Native feeling and agency. Take, for example, Philip Deloria. Deloria's *Playing Indian* (1998) argues that Indian play in various forms and times helped shape the American identity. He discusses the inherent contradiction in the phrase "noble savage," noting that, depending on which word is given more weight, society can glorify man's "natural" state or seek to exterminate barbarism. *Playing Indian* argues that such a contradiction is the formation of American identity, and that Indian play gave people the opportunity to engage it: unchanging essential Americanness on one hand and the American liberty to make oneself into something new on the other. The simple act of donning clothes made this idea real and concrete.[27] Deloria expands the concept even unto the Native

[26] Renee Laegreid, *Riding Pretty: Rodeo Royalty in the American West* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2006), 11-13.

[27] Philip Deloria, *Playing Indian* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998).

population when he states in the Conclusion, "Even as Indian play has been an invasion of the realities of native people, it has been an intercultural meeting ground upon which Indians and non-Indians have created new identities, not only for white Americans, but for Indians themselves."[28] The concept that merely donning clothes and acting a certain way makes ideas seem more real directly corresponds to Native actions and audience education in Wild West shows. Because Euro-American audiences saw Native Americans wearing stereotypical Plains headdresses, living in tipis, and attacking setters' cabins, they believed that all American Indians did these things, regardless of tribal affiliation or circumstance.

Concerning Native scholars writing Native history and decolonization, perhaps no one promotes the concept more than Susan A. Miller. Miller can come off as angry and defensive in her writing, although the reader sees quite obviously that she goes to great lengths not to be. As a Native American writing about her own history and its portrayal in academia, her frustration is merely a perspective that she cannot let go. This is not necessarily a bad thing given the subject matter; the content of her work sometimes calls for a bit of righteous anger. Miller's seminal article, "Native America Writes Back: The Origin of the Indigenous Paradigm in Historiography (2008)," discusses the concept of decolonization. Several American Indian scholars are rejecting—and seeking to decolonize—the consensual narrative of American history and the Euro American paradigm that frames it to develop a separate and competing narrative. Miller discusses the concepts of indigenousness, sovereignty, colonization, decolonization, and indigenous methodology. Indigenousness she defines as not merely the earliest occupation of land,

[28] Ibid., 187.

but characteristics shared by polities that have not adopted the nation-state type of organization, especially the idea of a living and sacred cosmos with rights and the relationship between people and their environment. Miller asserts that the US has had and continues to have a colonial relationship with Native tribes, and that decolonization is a process to shed and recover from it. The methodology used has a large basis in language. Currently, a movement to recover tribal languages is underway, as is the encouragement to choose one's words carefully when writing from an Indigenous viewpoint. For example, saying "the government" to refer to the US federal government implies that it is the only one. Using the term "battle" to refer to the events at Sand Creek or Washita obscures the massacre that took place.[29]

Miller's framework of decolonization is important for historians seeking to investigate Native history as it offers a sensitive way to do so. Unfortunately, Euro-American men have written American Indian history, which has proved disastrous to many tribal memories and customs. The concept of decolonization is an effort to reframe the discussion on history to be nearer the truth as the Native Americans themselves experienced it, not merely the perspective of the Euro-American men who witnessed it.

For scholarship about Show Indians, L. G. Moses' *Wild West Shows and the Images of American Indians, 1883-1933* (1996) is the pivotal source. *Wild West Shows and the Images of American Indians* argues that the Wild West shows and the federal government engaged in a battle of imagery: the shows saw natives as "noble," while the US federal government saw them as "ignoble" and sought to assimilate them. Moses refused to victimize Native Americans, and argued that Indians saw the shows as an

[29] Susan A. Miller, "Native America Writes Back: The Origin of the Indigenous Paradigm in Historiography," *Wicazo Sa Review* 23, no.2 (Fall 2008): 9-28.

alternative to assimilation, and that the resulting manipulation of image is how Native culture survived. The book tells the story of the show Indians, first through George Catlin's expositions, then through Buffalo Bill's creation of the Wild West show, and then the consequences of the Ghost Dance on (and arrested members' participation in) the show. Finally, the text compares Buffalo Bill's show to that of the Miller Brothers', and discusses the rise of western film and the decline of Wild West shows. The book's wider theme about imagery discusses Federal Indian Policy and reformers' attitudes towards the shows, the constant competition of images between the government and the shows, and eventual changes in Indian Policy and attitudes circa World War I.[30] When exploring the dichotomous perception of American Indians in Wild West shows, Moses' text is of foremost importance. His refusal to victimize show Indians is a crucial first step in the process of recognizing Native agency in spite of federal assimilationist policies.

Because of the essential nature of the text's argument, almost everything about Show Indians written since heavily leans on and builds on *Wild West Shows and the Images of American Indians*. Three articles will serve to prove my point. The first is by Ryan E. Burt, ""Sioux Yells" in the Dawes Era: Lakota "Indian Play," the Wild West, and the Literatures of Luther Standing Bear" (2010), which argues that European and Euro-American audiences held superficial views of Native Americans, but that some Native Americans tried to use this fascination to their advantage. The concept of acting with intent directly correlates to the point Moses made; that the manipulation of Native imagery enabled the culture to survive. Like *Wild West Shows and the Images of American Indians*, ""Sioux Yells"" refuses to victimize Native Americans, saying they

[30] Moses, *Wild West Shows and the Images of American Indians*, xiii, 5.

knew what Euro-Americans were thinking and that is why they "played Indian." He uses Luther Standing Bear as a case study. Standing Bear toured with Buffalo Bill for a year, acted as a translator, and advocated for his people. Upon his return to America, he entered the Western film industry and wrote four books about his own life and his people's history and customs, continuing to advocate for change. His popularity was his ticket to Euro-Americans' hearts and minds.[31]

The second article, Daniel Justin Herman's book review of Paul Reddin's *Wild West Shows* entitled "God Bless Buffalo Bill," Herman proposed a double thesis that conflicted with the field of Western imagery in the shows. Herman agreed that Cody and his show sponsored, celebrated, and commemorated a racial form of imperialism. Herman argued Cody told a narrative focused on white civilization overtaking Indian lands. However, Herman's article also wondered if perhaps rather than confirming Americans' imperialism, the Wild West shows might have offered a way to relax the tensions generated by real conflict. For example, Native Americans "killed" in the battle scenes would rise from the dust at the end of the act and were favorites with white audiences. By the refusal to victimize American Indians, "God Bless Buffalo Bill" builds upon Moses' work.[32]

The third article, "Kicking Bear, John Trudell, and Anthony Keidis (of the Red Hot Chili Peppers): Show Indians and Pop Cultural Colonialism" (2012), by Cynthia L. Landrum, also agreed with Moses by arguing that show Indians have acted with intent; a

[31] Ryan E. Burt, ""Sioux Yells" in the Dawes Era: Lakota "Indian Play," the Wild West, and the Literatures of Luther Standing Bear," *American Quarterly* 62 (September 2010): 617-637.

[32] Daniel Justin Herman, "God Bless Buffalo Bill," *Reviews in American History* 29, no. 2 (June 2001): 228-237.

vital concept to remember when discussing the experiences of Wild West show Indians. What the label of a "show Indian," means has changed over time: from Kicking Bear's conquered yet noble warrior in the Wild West show, to American Indian Movement activist John Trudell, to the modern politicized lead singer of the band the Red Hot Chili Peppers Anthony Kiedis. This article also leans heavily on *Playing Indian* by Philip Deloria when it states that Euro-Americans saw American Indians as either noble or ignoble savages and that the US national identity is therefore rooted in these two conflicting ideologies. Furthermore, this article also agrees with White by pointing out that Frederick Jackson Turner's message of free land conflicted with Buffalo Bill's imagery of violent conquest.[33]

To understand the story Wild West shows portrayed, it is also necessary to understand the larger image of the American West. At their most basic level, Wild West shows were performances that capitalized on the public's perception of the western myth. In his chapter "The Prairie and Cooper's Invention of the West" in *James Fennimore Cooper: New Critical Essays* (1985), Gordon Brotherston argued that James Fennimore Cooper was largely responsible for inventing the western image. Brotherston pointed out that easterners were attracted to the idea of the Far West: the land of the Louisiana Purchase, animals such as buffalo, and the visits of many Native American chiefs to Washington, D.C., in the 1820s fascinated many. Cooper's writing portrayed Indians as either "good" or "bad." Good natives, such as the Pawnee, had small towns, only a little history, and no trade. This of course is not accurate, as the Pawnee had a vast trade

[33] Cynthia L. Landrum, "Kicking Bear, John Trudell, and Anthony Keidis (of the Red Hot Chili Peppers): Show Indians and Pop Cultural Colonialism," *The American Indian Quarterly* 36 (Spring 2012): 182-214.

system and a long, complicated history and culture. By presenting the Pawnee and other Indians as "good," however, the white population more easily resigned Indians to reservations. Similarly, Cooper's writing presented the "bad" Natives, such as the Sioux, as having vast land holdings, which provided justification for the Euro Americans taking it.[34]

Richard Slotkin greatly expanded the study of the western image. His *Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth-Century America* (1992) is the last of a trilogy on the frontier myth.[35] In *Gunfighter Nation,* Slotkin examined the pervasive influence of western myths on American popular culture, seeking to form a continuum of media such as dime novels, Buffalo Bill's Wild West show, films, television series, and even politics.[36] Slotkin argued the American public should understand *why* past generations used certain words and should choose our present words with the utmost care, as they will be around to haunt future generations. The significance he places on language is eerily similar to Susan A. Miller's work on Indigenous decolonization, although Miller's concept of decolonization is not the point Slotkin is trying to make. He focuses on the white man's version of the myth, while she focuses on the indigenous point of view.[37]

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[34] Gordon Brotherston, "The Prairie and Cooper's Invention of the West," in *James Fenimore Cooper: New Critical Essays*, ed. Robert Clark (London: Vision Press, 1985).

[35] *Gunfighter Nation* followed *Regeneration through Violence* (1973), which discusses America from 1600-1860, and *The Fatal Environment* (1985), which focuses on the Industrial Revolution 1800-1890.

[36] Richard Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth-Century America*, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1998).

[37] Miller, "Native America Writes Back," 9-28.

Like Slotkin's dissection of language, Richard Etulain was preoccupied with the topic's framework. Consequently, his work is also similar to Susan A. Miller's decolonization thesis. Etulain's introductory chapter "The Rise of Western Historiography" in *Writing Western History: Essays on Major Western Historians* (2002), offers an overview of how easterners viewed the West, from dime novels and the Wild West shows, to historian Frederick Jackson Turner, popular author Zane Grey, and artist Frederick Remington. In this essay, Etulain builds on Slotkin's *Gunfighter Nation* (1992) and Paul Reddin's *Wild West Shows* (1999) by attempting to put Western imagery into a continuum. It also makes the point that the themes, approaches, and conclusions of current historians are all based on, or at the least build upon, the frontier and regional theme of Turner.[38]

Finally, let us turn to a discussion about the Georgian riders in the Wild West shows. The first book to focus on their involvement is *Wild West Georgians* (2001) by Irakli Makharadze and Akaki Chkhaidze. Makharadze is a Georgian filmmaker, and Chkhaidze is the General Director of Georgian Railways and a part-time professor. The authors' main purpose in writing *Wild West Georgians* is merely to get the story of Georgian involvement in the show published. There is a significant lack in the literature and they were the first to seek to fill it. As Georgians writing about Georgians, they of course are a bit prejudiced and argue that the riders were the best and that audiences loved them. The authors do not condemn the riders for any blunders they may have made (nor, however, do the authors condemn anyone else). The tone leans toward the romantic, as an account harkening back to the glory days of the riders, but the text holds no overt

[38] Etulain, "Introduction: The Rise of Western Historiography," 7, 12.

flowery language to disguise the difficult time the riders had while on the road. The book is unique in that it offers a discussion regarding the women riders, such as Christine Tsintsadze, the only Georgian female on record to have performed with Pawnee Bill's Historical Wild West. True, the authors award the female riders only a few pages; but the discussion becomes significant when one takes into consideration that the entire book is short.[39]

The only other book to discuss Georgian performers is *Cossacks, Indians, and Buffalo Bill: The Adventures of Georgian Riders in America* (2011) by Richard Alexis Georgian. The author is not a professionally trained historian, but valiantly tried to behave like one and, in my opinion, came terribly close. It is written in a style that is sometimes more akin to a journal of facts than a historical narrative, but Georgian took his research seriously. He conducted original research using many manuscript collections, an inordinate number of newspaper articles, interviews, and a few secondary sources (most notably *Wild West Georgians*). *Cossacks, Indians, and Buffalo Bill* offers wonderfully straightforward and insightful information on the oppressed and revolutionary state of Georgia circa 1900, how Georgians negatively viewed Cossacks and why, and especially the details of Georgian life in American tent shows, particularly Buffalo Bill's and Pawnee Bill's Wild West shows.[40]

We must realize that researchers have only recently studied the subject of Georgian performers in Wild West shows, and that the authors of both these texts are all non-academics seeking to fill this gap. Like the first publications of texts focusing on

[39] Makharadze and Chkhaidze, *Wild West Georgians*. 35-39.

[40] Richard Alexis Georgian, *Cossacks, Indians, and Buffalo Bill: The Adventures of Georgian Riders in America* (Naples, FL: Barringer Publishing, 2011).

Wild West shows in the late 1980s and early 1990s, we see that the real groundbreakers are *not* professionally trained historians, educated to seek out new paths and ideas, but rather those with a real passion for the topic.

To continue to ponder the element of personal passion in gaining attention for the topic and to sum up the theme of the marginalization of women throughout the study of the American Western image and Wild West performers of any ethnicity, let us turn to Anne Firor Scott. An avowed feminist and a true trailblazer on women's history, her article "On Seeing and Not Seeing: A Case of Historical Invisibility" (1984) was initially given as a conference address. It argues women throughout history have in fact shaped social life, and we as historians need to see why women are unremarked by scholars so as to better understand the general problem of historical invisibility. She stated men's work cannot be understood without discussing women's. For example, one way women took on ever-wider roles in political and social reform without overstepping social boundaries was by emphasizing their responsibilities as mothers. The reform work women did was obviously significant, so "On Seeing and Not Seeing" ponders the concept of "historical invisibility." Why do we not see their contributions? She argued that, largely, men shape culture. Male historians, therefore, did not *expect* to see women in politics, so vast evidence to the contrary went unnoticed.[41]

"On Seeing and Not Seeing" offers a paradigm by which we can begin to see previously invisible things. First, someone (usually one whose experience does not jive with the history books) must notice what historical inquiry has ignored. For example, Frederick Jackson Turner grew up on a frontier, and Scott herself worked with other

[41] Anne Firor Scott, "On Seeing and Not Seeing: A Case of Historical Invisibility," *Journal of American History* 71 (June 1984): 9-21.

women in politics, so their personal experiences taught them things that were not elaborated upon in common history texts. Once these unnoticed perspectives appear such new areas of inquiry are accepted into the general body of knowledge. Sometimes this happens quickly because of cultural forces. For example, during 1960s activism, Black historians were able to change dramatically the way Americans looked at African American history. At the time of her writing in 1984, Scott wondered whether women's history was undergoing a similar process.[42]

I would argue that it has not. Within the decade of the 1960s, Scott perceived that the portrayal of African-American history reversed a proverbial 180 degrees. Such an abrupt shift has not been the case for women's history or gender studies, which enjoyed a brief span of popularity but which academia has again marginalized. Too few female historians exist in university and high school history departments. Too many high school and collegiate freshman level American history courses focus exclusively on men, as do many of the popular histories available to the general populace; if any of these mediums mention women they are only the "great women" in passing.

I agree with Scott's statement, however, that the first step to seeing previously invisible things is that someone whose own experiences differ from the commonly accepted historical view must see it. I see such a case in my own life. A native of Pawnee, Oklahoma, I grew up only a few miles from Pawnee Bill Ranch and Museum, the home of Gordon and May Lillie. Today the 500-acre spread houses the historic mansion, a museum, and continues to be a working buffalo ranch.

[42] Ibid., 21.

This particular research project focuses on many relatively new areas. Many historians write about Buffalo Bill Cody but only a few mention Lillie even in passing. Too few academic texts discuss the early cowgirls, despite a wealth of primary sources, although Sarah Wood-Clark's *Beautiful Daring Western Girls* is a thorough essay. Some historians discuss male "show Indians," such as L.G. Moses in his *Wild West Shows and the Images of American Indians*, which fills a large void in the literature and makes the compelling argument that, in Wild West shows at least, American Indians acted with intent and therefore cannot be victimized. Even this text, however, overlooks Native women. The Georgian riders are completely ignored in academia, and only within the last decade have there been *any* books written about them at all. Of the two existing books, only Makharadze and Chkhaidze's *Wild West Georgians* discusses the presence and contributions of female riders. These three texts are all tremendous beginnings but, rich in quality though they may be, are not enough. We need to examine in great depth the experiences of early cowgirls, Native American women, and Georgians with the Wild West shows. We need to realize that for these three groups, employment in the Wild West show meant opportunity of some kind, whether societal, cultural, or economic. As Anne Firor Scott argued, we must continue to see invisible things.

On the Road:

Life Along the Show Route of Pawnee Bill's Historic Wild West

"A six-shooter makes men and women equal."

– Agnes Morley Cleaveland,

New Mexican rancher and author of *No Life for a Lady*,

1941

Imagine. You are sleepy, tired, exhausted. Your muscles are sore and your limbs bruised from the fall you took yesterday. You want nothing more than to collapse onto your bed, yet you remind yourself that coming on this fool's errand was your choice, and there are things that make the fatigue worthwhile. Speaking of which, time to get to work. Hurry, you remind yourself, hurry. Sure, you were late and missed the train last night, but no one cares about what's past; you just can't be late *now*. You rise to your feet and walk quickly, jamming your hat firmer on your head. You stride out…

… into the midst of train cars creaking and rumbling and whistling. You retrieve your horse from the next tent over and mount up, the grimy leather reins automatically finding their respective calloused grooves in your hands. Guiding your horse agilely through the throng of white families who have not yet taken their seats and the older schoolboys who have already vacated them in search of a small adventure is, fortunately, a skill you've learned so thoroughly you don't need to think while doing so. You're too tired to think. You finally reach the gate and proceed to ignore Heck as he glares at you for almost being late before he gallops away, with you right behind him. You duck beneath the colorful banners whipping in the wind and try not to breathe the dust kicked up from so many racing horses. Raising your eyes, you wave to the audience, a grand smile upon your face. You are in an arena crowded with all manner of people, performing in Pawnee Bill's Historic Wild West.

Pawnee Bill's traveling show was a large, complicated, and dangerous operation. The perception of the American West the show presented to easterners was far from reality, but the myth spread largely because of the railroads and the entertainment success of the show. To illustrate this, a discussion of route books is helpful. Route books are a

journal by show administrators of the shows' travels and the casts' daily lives, published at the end of each season as souvenirs for show audiences. For this project, the author examined four route books published between 1895 and 1900 by Captain A.G. Shaw and Harry G. Wilson. They provided a wealth of information. They supply raw data of the cities in which the show performed, the railroads the show used, and how many miles they traveled each day. Personal stories abound, such as tales of the various injuries cast and crewmembers sustained. Further in the paper, the author discusses how eastern audiences perceived the American West through various media, and how the Wild West shows fit into this larger picture. Perhaps the most helpful secondary source on this topic was Ryan E. Burt's article ""Sioux Yells" in the Dawes Era: Lakota "Indian Play," the Wild West, and the Literatures of Luther Standing Bear," published in *American Quarterly* in 2010. In this article, Burt discusses the perception European and Euro-American audiences held of the Native Americans who performed in Wild West shows, and how some natives attempted to use this fascination to their advantage.

The tale of daily life along the route of Pawnee Bill's Historic Wild West is inextricably tied to the railroads of the late nineteenth century. In the US, railroads reached their peak in the 1910s. More than 195,000 miles of track were in service by 1900 with a few years of expansion ahead, mainly in the south and west. Things were going well, so the railroad companies capitalized on the prosperity by promoting luxurious passenger trains. Vacationers could travel to exotic places like California, and business travelers rode the fast "Limiteds."[1] If one measured distance in time, then the

[1] Editors of Publications International, Inc., "Early Twentieth Century Railroads," How Stuff Works. http://history.howstuffworks.com/american-history/early-twentieth-century-railroads.htm (accessed 7 March 2012).

world had shrunk. Places connected by railroads suddenly seemed much closer than they had been. The fast and inexpensive transport of goods meant towns could specialize and engage in more trade.[2]

In addition to trading goods and services, the railroads also allowed the Wild West shows to proliferate and reach a large audience. The originator of the Wild West show, Buffalo Bill Cody put this idea to good use, and Pawnee Bill was not to be outdone. He did have an organizational nightmare on his hands, however. He had to pack and transport a large number of people, cattle, horses, props, costumes, tents, wagons, tack, and anything else a cast member thought they needed. Furthermore, he had to do it safely and efficiently. One can easily think of Pawnee Bill's Historic Wild West as a small operation—that was not the case. The sheer number of people involved is astounding. The show crew included: a physician; a legal representative; skilled laborers like a mechanic, a carpenter, a harness maker, a canvas repairman, and a barber; billposters who traveled ahead of the show to post advertisements; a wardrobe department that handled costuming; a chandelier department in charge of lights; ticket sellers; ushers; cowhands who took care of the stock in the horse and cattle tents; drivers and assistants for eight-, six-, and four-horse teams; a cook and his assistant; waiters; butchers; and the confectionary department. Then there were the performers. Show announcers, sharpshooters, Roman riders, trick riders, a whip artist, Native Americans, a band of Arab brothers, and a cavalry drill team begin the list. Several individual stars performed, as well. Pawnee Bill and his wife May, for example, demonstrated expert rifle shooting, each holding or throwing targets for the other. A friend of Pawnee Bill's and

[2] Rebecca Solnit, *River of Shadows: Eadweard Muybridge and the Technological Wild West* (New York: Penguin Group, 2003), 9-10.

the ranch foreman in the off-season, José Barrera led the Mexicans in the show and also performed feats with his lasso.[3]

The annex, a side tent that housed eccentric acts for the audience to visit before the show, was almost another show entirely. This operation had its own ticket sellers, door warden, military band, and canvas men. Performers included a mind reader, a snake charmer, a tattooed man, and two sisters called the "Fat Woman and Skeleton," for example.[4]

After each evening show, the laborers would load the supplies on any number of railcars, such as flat cars, stock cars, horse cars, and sleepers for the cast and crew, some of which were reserved for celebrities like May Lillie.[5] They would travel throughout the night, and arrive early the next morning; cast and crew considered 8:00 am quite late.[6] The show lots were sometimes near the railroad tracks, but more often were two or three miles away. The crew would immediately go to work. A team of canvas, stake, and chain men constructed the massive tents each day in each new city (such as horse tents, a dressing tent, a dining tent, the tent for the annex, and the arena tent which alone was 600 feet square).[7] The lot would be bustling with activity: the cook would set up shop and repairmen would maintain the wagons or tack. Later in the morning, the cast paraded from the railway station, through town, to the show lot.[8] The parade served a dual

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[3] Wilson and Nicodemus, *Season 1900*, 7-31; Wilson, *Season 1898*, 8-24.

[4] Wilson, *Season 1898,* 26-44.

[5] Shaw, *Season 1895,* 31, 43.

[6] Ibid., 83.

[7] Wilson *Season 1900,* 19; Wilson *Season 1898,* 3.

[8] Shaw, *Season 1895,* 35.

purpose. It may have simply served as a way for the cast to get to the show grounds, but the pomp and pageantry associated with the parade was a form of advertising to get the townspeople interested. The cast performed two shows daily; a matinee in the afternoon and an evening show. The admission cost depended upon the show time, and fluctuated between twenty-five and fifty cents.[9]

The exact show program fluctuated from year to year, but usually followed a general pattern. The show always began with the Grand Entry—a preview of what the audience was going to see wherein all the performers were in the arena at the same time. The attentive audience member could group the acts into four categories: cowboy life, races, military demonstrations, and Eastern acts. Cowboy life included things like bronc riding, trick roping, or the whip act. Bronc riding was when men would attempt to ride bucking horses, either saddled or bareback, while the pickup men rode beside them to haul the rider off should he make his time. Trick roping was when a performer would do tricks with his lariat, or rope horses, steers, or people, in a fancy way. During the whip act, the whip artist would crack many whips at once, oversized whips, or break targets with the whip. The Mexican Contra Dance on Horseback (a horseback version of the popular dance) and the stagecoach robbery included the cowgirls as well as the men. Races included the Chariot Race, the Roman Riding Race (wherein each rider rode two galloping horses at once, standing up with a foot on each horse), the Ladies Race between the horseback cowgirls, and the Race of Nations between a horseback American cowboy, an American Indian, a Mexican vaquero, and a "Russian Cossack." The military demonstrations included cavalry drills and reenactments of famous battles; usually the

[9] Ibid., 33.

latter involved Native Americans conducting a war dance, and then capturing and torturing hostages in stereotypical roles. Pawnee Bill added several Eastern acts around the 1900 show season, such as Arabian riders, Japanese acrobats, and Georgian riders who the show mistakenly billed as "Russian Cossacks."[10]

The grand finale was the Attack on the Settler's Cabin, wherein American Indians attacked a white family and Pawnee Bill and his courageous band rode in to save the day. Last, the Final Salute, a chance for all the performers to enter the arena at the same time and for the audience to get one last look at all the associated pageantry, ended the experience on a high note.[11]

After the evening show, workers re-loaded the train and the entire affair began all over again. The only time the cast members earned a reprieve was on Sunday, the only day the cast and crew did not travel or put on a show.[12]

With such a large operation, things were bound to go wrong. Several mishaps happened along the railroad. In June 1898, one of the trucks on a flatcar broke while the train was moving, so the train stopped; the men unloaded it and then reloaded it on two other flatcars, which delayed the operation three hours.[13] Instead of merely breaking, a wagon could fall completely off the train while in motion.[14] Alternatively, the flatcar

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[10] Shaw, *Season 1895*, 21-25; Wilson, *Season 1898*, 44-48; Wilson, *Season 1899*,33-39 ; Wilson, *Season 1900*, 35-39; Nicodemus and Wilson, *Season 1901*.

[11] Ibid.

[12] Shaw, *Season 1895*, 96.

[13] Wilson, *Season 1898*, 62.

[14] Wilson, *Season 1900*, 85.

itself could leave the tracks entirely.[15] During the loading and unloading phases, engines often struck wagons, wagons struck each other, or wagons struck something else that happened to be in the way.[16] Fire was perhaps the worst of the possibilities, however. In May 1900, a gas stove in privilege car entitled the "Oklahoma" exploded, setting the car afire. A second train pulled into the station and the railroad yardmaster ordered the engineer to hit the show's train and sever the burning Oklahoma car from the rest of the train, thereby saving the rest of the people and supplies. By this time, however, the Oklahoma car was "a perfect volcano, every window and ventilator spouting fire." It may have been a charred shell, but show administrators deemed the Oklahoma repairable.[17] With so many examples of how easily things could break, the reader may see exactly why all the carpenters, mechanics, harness makers, and other repair technicians of varying stripes were necessary.

Mistakes were not exclusive to railroad matters; many were made regarding the cast and crew as well. One would think with such almost constant traveling the cast and crew would have the railway schedules permanently etched into their minds. Yet, the train often left people behind when it pulled out each evening. In June 1900, the route book noted that Jimmy Dugan, a crewmember, was so busy that he missed the train, yet managed to show up in time for business the next morning.[18] The crewmen were hardly the only ones who made such mistakes, however. In October 1895, seven men failed to make the train in Terrell, Texas, one of whom was Heck Quinn, an important figure in

[15] Shaw, *Season 1895,* 31.

[16] Ibid., 99.

[17] Wilson, *Season 1900*, 43.

[18] Ibid., 53.

Pawnee Bill's Historic Wild West. Behind the scenes, he served as the Equestrian Director, but he was also a big name performer. Billed as "King of the Cowboys," he led the western riders, in addition to being involved in several other aspects of the show such as playing a vigilante during the Hanging of the Horse Thief act.[19] Perhaps the funniest (or saddest, depending on one's point of view) instance of someone being left behind was in October 1895 in Alexandria, Louisiana. Tip the dog was discovered missing when the show reached the next town, so show administrators dispatched a man to go back to try to find him. Tip was at the depot, and had refused to eat while waiting for the rescuer who, with a dog's loyalty, he knew would come.[20]

Merely being left behind was the least of a cast member's travel worries, however. Getting deliberately pushed off the train was much worse, and seemingly just as common. In July 1898 on the way to Hamilton, Ohio, the cook "fell" off the train after having a disagreement with some of the crewmembers. Upon the cook's return to the show the next day, two crewmen left in a hurry—the two incidents were, of course, completely unrelated.[21] The working men also proved chivalry was dead or at least dying along the show route. In August 1895 on the way to Alpena, Michigan, a group of men pushed two girls off the train a full eighteen miles away from the city. This earned them an admonishment in the route book that year: "bad boys to push the girls that way."[22]

It was all fun and games until someone got hurt, which happened all too often along the show route. Bucking horses threw their riders, horses fell underneath cowboys,

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[19] Shaw, *Season 1895,* 95; Wilson, *Season 1898,* 10, 34, 42.

[20] Shaw, *Season 1895,* 96.

[21] Wilson, *Season 1898,* 83.

[22] Shaw, *Season 1895,* 74.

bison rammed their handlers, and ankles, ribs, and almost every other bone in the human body were broken in the process.[23] Even acts that cast had performed hundreds of times were suspect. During the Expert Rifle Practice, wherein Pawnee Bill and May held or threw targets for each other, a bullet ricocheted off the target May was holding and severed the smallest two fingers on her right hand.[24] She finished the act, and the doctor attended her immediately. The audience, however, had seen the blood running out of her gauntlet, and refused to leave after the show until she came out and waved, proving to everyone she was all right.[25] Ever after, she hid her hand in pictures, so no photograph exists of the injury. Such an experience is important to a discussion of gender because as a Victorian lady, society expected certain things of May. Victorian ladies should be dainty and certainly should not do anything so dangerous as rifle practice. Such an injury could well have been a daily reminder of her perceived "impropriety."

Railroad travel was dangerous for the cast and crew, as well. In 1897 in Ashland, Pennsylvania, a train engine struck four men between the ages of nineteen and twenty-four. The incident killed two; the other two were severely injured.[26] In September 1895 in Pine Bluff, Arkansas, two rail cars hit each other while being coupled up, injuring six men. The strike was so hard, some other men inside were knocked completely through the windows.[27] Perhaps the most horrendous episode was in 1898, when Lee Evans, a

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[23] Wilson *Season 1898*, 97, 102, 107.

[24] Ibid., 105.

[25] "Just May," *Tulsa Tribune,* 18 September 1936; Pawnee Bill Ranch and Museum, Pawnee, Oklahoma, "May Lillie" Exhibit.

[26] "Killed by an Engine at Girardville," *New York Times*, 1897, no page.

[27] "Wild West Men Injured," *New York Times,* 1895, no page; Shaw, *Season 1895,* 83.

worker in the horse tent, sleepwalked off the train. The entire train passed over his left arm and leg, severing them completely near his body. The show's physician took him and caught the first train back to the previous town, Richmond, Indiana, but Evans died en route.[28]

The audience was not immune to danger, either, perhaps adding to the excitement of attending the Wild West. During a 1900 matinee, the bison and steers "got mixed up in the seats… and made things lively for both the cowboys and the audience." Fortunately, no one was injured.[29]

A statistical discussion can be informative. The researcher was able to examine four route books between the years of 1895 and 1900: those for 1895, 1898, 1899, and 1900 (see Table 1). In 1895, the cast and crew put on seventy-nine total shows in nineteen states. The show traveled an average of 128.5 miles per day. For unknown reasons, the route book for the 1895 season did not record the railroads the show used.[30] In 1898, the cast put on 164 shows in thirteen states, traveling on average fifty miles per day. The most frequently used railroad company was Big Four Railroad, operating in Ohio, Illinois, and Indiana, with seventeen times. They used the Pittsburg and Lake Erie Railroad sixteen times, which operated in New York and New Jersey, and the Pennsylvania Railroad fourteen times, as they traveled throughout Pennsylvania and Ohio.[31]

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[28] Wilson, *Season 1898,* 83.

[29] Wilson, *Season 1900,* 53.

[30] Shaw, *Season 1895,* 26-106.

[31] Wilson *Season 1898,* 48-112.

Table 1
Shows, States, Miles, and Railroads

Year	**1895**	**1898**	**1899**	**1900**
Total Shows	79	164	138	141
Total States	19	13	11	11
Avg. Daily Miles	128.5	50	52	49
Top Three Railroads Used – No. of Times Used that Season	No railroads given in route book for this season.	Big Four RR-17	New York, New Haven, & Hartford RR-26	Pennsylvania RR-22
		Pittsburg & Lake Erie RR-16	Pennsylvania RR-18	Flint & Pere Marquette RR-10
		Pennsylvania RR-14	Big Four RR-16	Philadelphia & Reading RR-10

Table detailing the total number of shows, total number of states, average daily miles traveled, and the three railroads the show used most often for the 1895, 1898, 1899, and 1900 seasons.

Map 1

Simplified Show Routes

Map of the United States illustrating a simplified show route for the 1895, 1898, 1899, and 1900 seasons.[32]

[32] About.com, "Free Blank Outline Maps of the United States," http://geography.about.com/library/blank/blxusa.htm (accessed 10 March 2012).

During the 1899 season, the cast and crew put on 138 shows in eleven states and traveled an average of fifty-two miles per day. The most frequently used line (twenty-six times) was the New York, New Haven, and Hartford Railroad as they traveled throughout Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, and New York. Again, the show used the Pennsylvania, Big Four, and Pittsburg and Lake Erie Railroads quite often (eighteen, sixteen, and fifteen times, respectively).[33] In the 1900 season, the show performed 141 shows in eleven states, and traveled an average of forty-nine miles per day. The most frequently used rail line by far was the Pennsylvania Railroad (twenty-two times; the next closest were the Flint and Pere Marquette and Philadelphia and Reading Railroads with ten each).[34]

Map 1 illustrates a simplified show route for the 1895, 1898, 1899, and 1900 seasons and demonstrates how the show route changed over the four years examined.[35] In 1895, the show began in April in Frederick, Maryland. They toured part of the Atlantic seaboard, such as Maryland and West Virginia, before moving into the New England states of Pennsylvania, New York, New Jersey. The show then moved to old Midwestern states like Ohio, Michigan, Indiana, and Illinois. Missouri, Arkansas, and Texas rounded out the western portion of the tour. Of the four shows, this season reached the furthest south, moving through Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, Florida, and Georgia before

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[33] Wilson, *Season 1899,* 39-88.

[34] Wilson, *Season 1900,* 39-105.

[35] Base map from the following source: About.com, "Free Blank Outline Maps of the United States," http://geography.about.com/library/blank/blxusa.htm (accessed 10 March 2012).

The map is simplified because Pawnee Bill's Historic Wild West often traveled back and forth between states (for example, the show might move between New York and Pennsylvania three or four times before moving on to Ohio). The dots on the map do not approximate a certain city.

finishing the season in the Carolinas. The last show of the season was on 20 November in Tarboro, North Carolina.[36] The 1898 and 1899 seasons showed almost exclusively in New England and the old Midwest, with the exception of a quick jaunt south through Kentucky, Tennessee, Alabama, and the Carolinas at the end of the 1898 season.[37] The 1899 season was the most exclusive. It began and ended in Pennsylvania, reached no further west than Illinois, and completely ignored the southern states.[38]

The 1900 season is the most interesting. Like the others, it began in New England; Chester, Pennsylvania, to be exact, on 5 May. It, too, ignored the southern states, but the show route seemed to have a certain destination in mind. It traveled through the old Midwest, giving Ohio, Michigan, Illinois, and Iowa their due, before heading south into Missouri and further west than the show had ever gone, traveling into Kansas before ending the year in Oklahoma Territory. Indeed, Pawnee Bill's Historic Wild West showed nine times in the Territory during late October: North Enid, El Reno, Chickasha, Kingfisher, the territorial capital of Guthrie, Pawnee Bill's adopted hometown of Pawnee, Stillwater, Perry, and Blackwell.[39] The show seemingly followed railroads still in use today (Map 2).[40] Why did Pawnee Bill choose to end this season in Oklahoma Territory, when up to this point all the shows had ended in the East? Perhaps he had business there. For example, in 1910, Pawnee Bill's friend Blue Hawk, a Pawnee medicine man, sold his

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[36] Shaw, *Season 1895*, 26-106.

[37] Wilson, *Season 1898*, 48-112; Wilson, *Season 1899*, 39-88.

[38] Wilson, *Season 1899*, 39-88.

[39] Wilson, *Season 1900*, 39-105.

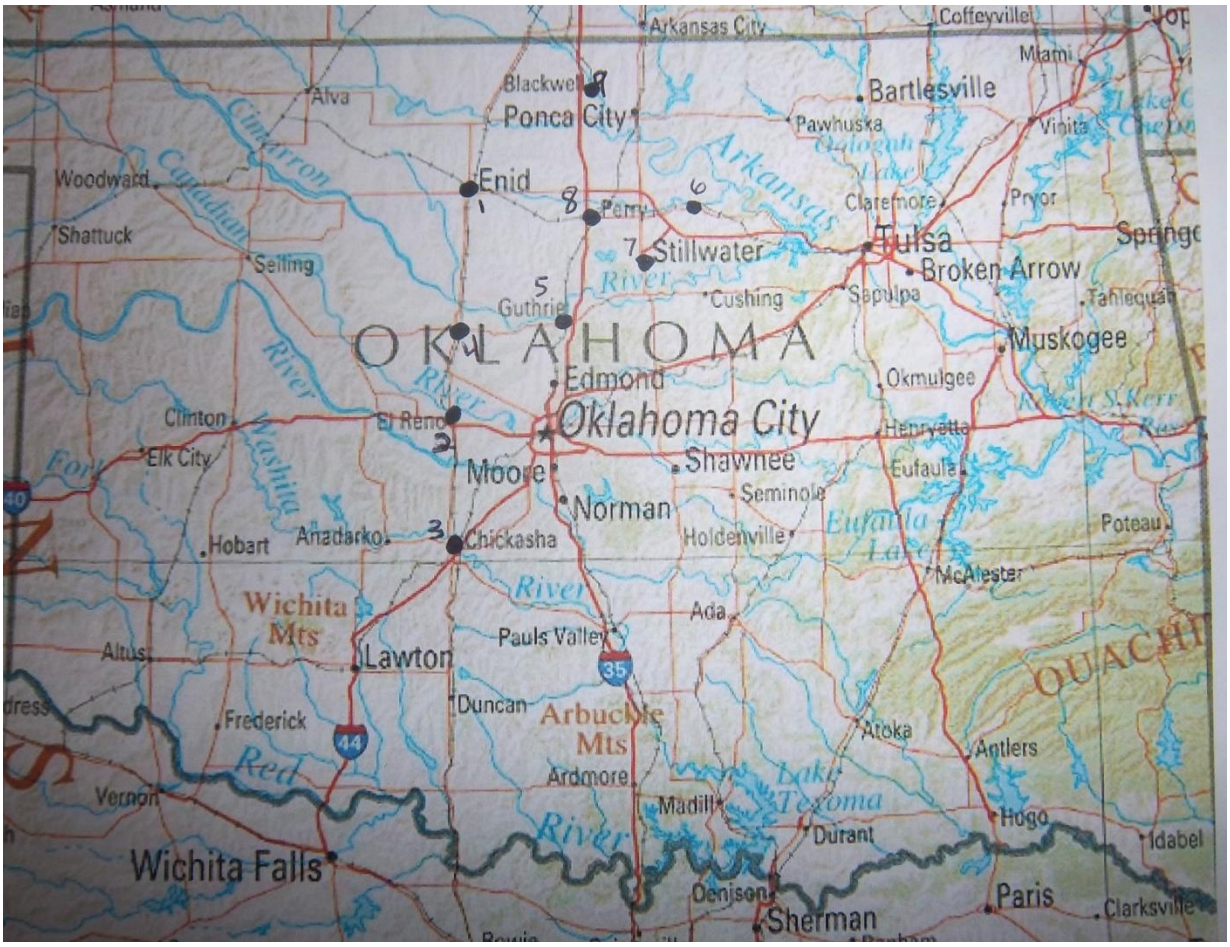
[40] University of Texas at Austin, "Perry-Castañeda Library Map Collection: Oklahoma Maps: Oklahoma Reference Map," **http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/us_2001/oklahoma_ref_2001.jpg** (accessed 2 March 2012).

allotment of 160 acres to Pawnee Bill for $3,000, and Pawnee Bill named the hilly land Blue Hawk Peak in honor of his friend.[41] Today, Pawnee Bill Ranch and Museum continues to maintain Pawnee Bill and May's historic mansion, a museum, and a herd of bison, as the Lillies wished.

This statistical discussion shows us there was a shift in travelling practices after 1895. They performed fewer shows in fewer states and traveled fewer daily miles. The exact reasons for this shift are unknown, but Pawnee Bill likely came to the realization that certain areas were more receptive to his show than others. By 1900, for example, almost all of the cities the show visited had been visited in previous seasons.[42] Furthermore, it is important to question the *kind* of West Pawnee Bill presented to eastern audiences. Pawnee Bill's Historic Wild West, despite advertisements to the contrary, was hardly accurate. Audiences in the eastern cities that the show visited, however, believed his faulty interpretation of western history and culture, as there was a long history of bending the truth about the American West.

[41] Pawnee Bill Ranch and Museum, Pawnee, Oklahoma, "Blue Hawk Peak" Exhibit.

[42] Shaw, *Season 1895*, 26-106; Wilson, *Season 1898*, 48-112; Wilson, *Season 1899*, 39-88; Wilson, *Season 1900*, 39-105.



Map 2

1900 Show Route in Oklahoma

Current map of Oklahoma, illustrating the route of Pawnee Bill's Wild West within Oklahoma in 1900. [43]

[43] University of Texas at Austin, "Perry-Castañeda Library Map Collection: Oklahoma Maps: Oklahoma Reference Map," **http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/us_2001/oklahoma_ref_2001.jpg** (accessed 2 March 2012).

Photographers and publishers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries often took liberties with the truth and created myths about the American West that eastern audiences accepted as truth. These sources went out of their way to seem real.[44] One of the first and most popular ways of bending the truth about the American West was in the novels of James Fennimore Cooper (1789-1851). Cooper wrote over thirty novels about the west from about 1829 to 1848, eleven of which dealt with Native Americans.[45] The public received his novels so well because easterners were extremely interested in the area of the Louisiana Purchase, wildlife such as bison, and the cultures of the Native Americans that were so different from their own. The visits of tribal chiefs to Washington, D.C., during the 1820s intrigued many.[46] In the minds of Euro-Americans, there existed a dichotomy between the "noble savage" and the "red devils." Cooper capitalized on this idea in his novels, and portrayed the Pawnee and Lenape as noble and the Sioux and Iroquois as dishonorable, regardless of the realities.[47] Indeed, in the 1829 preface to *The Prairie*, he admits doing so merely for simplicity's sake, saying:

> In the endless confusion of names, customs, opinions and languages, which exists among the tribes of the West, the author has paid much more attention to sound and convenience, than to literal truth.[48]

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[44] Michael Kammen, "How the West was Seen," *Reviews in American History* 31, no.3 (September 2003): 406-413.

[45] Brotherston, "The Prairie and Cooper's Invention of the West," 162.

[46] Ibid., 164-5.

[47] Ibid., 168-9.

[48] Ibid., 169.

For example, in his novels, Cooper portrays the Pawnee as "good" natives (sophisticated, having towns, etc.), but still ignorant, with no real culture and as having no concepts of what lays outside their realm. In reality, the Pawnee had a long venerable history and participated heavily in international trade.[49] On the other hand, Cooper attributes strength and the occupancy of major tracts of land to the "bad" natives, rather than the "good" ones. By doing so, he and his readers could justify Euro-American intrusion and the forced removal of tribal members to reservations.[50] Cooper helped to invent the West by telling a story the ever greedy US could hear and would appreciate—a narrative of eventual white dominance over the "red devils" and even the "noble savages."[51] Such a tale was perfect for Pawnee Bill and his enterprise. The version of the American West Lillie portrayed in his show was, quite helpfully, already widespread through America's general consciousness. Natives could be "bad," such as during the act the Attack on the Settler's Cabin, or "good," such as in the encampment in the show lot when they spoke to visitors about their daily work and lives.

Readers of novels were not the only eastern Americans to hold a fascination with the West; everyone jumped on that bandwagon. The discovery of an inexpensive way to print on pulp paper led to hundreds of thousands of "dime novels" (so called because they sold for ten cents) from the 1860s to the 1890s. These storylines were large exaggerations or even outright lies of real-life characters such as Kit Carson, Billy the Kid, or Calamity

[49] Ibid., 171-2.

[50] Ibid., 169, 172.

[51] Ibid., 180.

Jane. The authors never lived in the areas or researched the people about whom they wrote.[52]

By the 1890s, sales of dime novels were on the decline, and the cowboy was the newest hero to enter Americans' cultural consciousness. Patrons such as artist Frederick Remington (1861-1909) and novelists Zane Grey (1872-1939) and the ever popular and prolific Louis L'Amour (1908-1988) became his champions, ensuring the cowboy's charisma was here to stay.[53]

It was perfect timing for Pawnee Bill's predecessor in the Wild West industry; former Pony Express rider, buffalo hunter, and Army scout Buffalo Bill Cody. In 1883, he organized the first Wild West, and, in the words of one author, "probably did more than any other attraction to popularize the West as a wild frontier."[54] Eastern audiences still had plenty of questions about what the west was really like. Cody and his Wild West assured them it was indeed a place where good-hearted and free-spirited riders and ropers could gallop across the prairie, a place where heroic vigilante justice against horse thieves and stagecoach robbers was still served.[55] Indeed, both Cody and Pawnee Bill rejected the word "show," insisting the extravaganza was an accurate representation of real life. That the proprietors and many cast members had lived through events the Wild West portrayed helped to authenticate this claim.[56]

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[52] Etulain, "Introduction," 5-6.

[53] Ibid., 6.

[54] Ibid., 4-5.

[55] Ibid.

[56] Burt, "'Sioux Yells,'" 618.

Today, of course, society uses the phrase "Wild West show" without thinking twice. Although Cody's and Lillie's incarnations were conceived as educational events, today's connotation is as more of a spectacle for entertainment. Furthermore, the public likely realizes, however faintly, that Cody and Lillie portrayed biased versions of the events, personalities, and, most of all, the perception of the West. This fundamental difference in the very meaning of the word "show" is but one more example of the complexity surrounding the study of Wild West shows.

Perhaps the most entrenched myth the Wild West industry put into the American consciousness was of the savage Native. Ticket sales depended on the concept of one of the most lasting falsehoods of cultural history: white victimhood by Plains Indians. In both Cody's and Pawnee Bill's shows, the role of the Native Americans was to attack whites: the robbery of the Deadwood stage, the wagon train attack, the Battle of Little Big Horn, the list goes on. White America had to transform itself from conqueror to victim, and the Wild West shows met that challenge exceedingly well.[57] Even the show posters and advertisements reek of Native barbarism. In one example, scenes from an "Indian camp," such as a "war dance" wherein almost naked men wearing elaborate feathered headdresses and brandishing tomahawks dance wildly around a bonfire, cover the entire poster.[58] Few, if any, other mediums could provide the drama and excitement of the Wild West shows.[59] Few other artistic interpretations stuck in the audiences' memories with such tenacity. Wild West administrators seem to say, "Oh, we were just

[57] Ibid, 621.

[58] Farnum, *Pawnee Bill's Historic Wild West,* 10-11.

[59] Kammen, "How the West was Seen," 409.

retaliating; we didn't mean to commit genocide," and the public bought it because that is what they wanted to hear.

Returning to the interpretation of statistical information found in the route books at this point can be informative. As previously shown, there was a shift in travelling practices after 1895; namely, the show did not move so far south, instead concentrating its efforts in New England and the traditional Midwest. These areas were more profitable for the show because there was no need to travel long miles in between towns and the turnout was likely larger because of a larger and denser population. Furthermore, these areas were more receptive to the image of the American West Pawnee Bill's show was trying to sell. The mainly urban area was full of people interested about the 'wide open spaces' of the plains. The derogatory perspective of Native Americans utilized by the show also resonated with the New Englanders, as many in the region had negative experiences with Native Americans several decades previously.

It is essential to realize, however, the Native Americans involved in the shows knew exactly what was happening and performed many examples of Native agency. A perfect example is Luther Standing Bear, who joined Buffalo Bill's Wild West for the 1902 season in England. On one occasion, as Standing Bear related in his autobiography *My People the Sioux* (1928), Cody asked him to please the king with an Indian dance during the show. Standing Bear recalled:

> I had a beautiful lance, and as the dance proceeded I worked over toward the King's box. There I shook the lance in his face and danced my very prettiest, you may be sure. The King had been very dignified thus far and had not even smiled. But when I got down to doing my fancy steps and gave a few Sioux yells, he had to smile in spite of himself. I saw that I had made a hit with him, and was very happy.[60]

[60] Burt, "'Sioux Yells,'" 617.

This amusing story shows without a doubt Standing Bear, along with most Native performers in the show, knew exactly the "type" of Indian a non-Native audience wanted to see. Standing Bear perceived this as his ticket to their hearts and minds. While in England, Standing Bear did not merely perform; he also translated, thereby bridging the gap somewhat between Native and white, and he advocated for the conditions of his people. After his season with Buffalo Bill, Standing Bear returned to the Pine Ridge agency in South Dakota to strive against the agent there for ten years before again entering the entertainment industry, this time in Hollywood. He wrote four books offering accounts of his life and the history of his people: *My People the Sioux* (1928), *My Indian Boyhood* (1931), *Land of the Spotted Eagle* (1933), and *Stories of the Sioux* (1934).[61] Obviously, he was well aware of the violent perception of Natives in dime novels, Wild West shows, and films, and sought to change it, or at least offer a more accurate perspective.

Indian play such as that conducted by Luther Standing Bear can, as Phillip Deloria argues in *Playing Indian*, have far-reaching consequences. The simple act of donning clothes and acting a certain way can make the ideas the actor is performing more real. Therefore, when American Indians wore stereotyped Plains feathered headdresses and shook their spears, they were, in their own way, actively engaging the paradoxical essence of American identity. Indians are Americans; to be American is to have liberty; and yet, at this time in history, the US federal government advocated assimilationist

[61] Ibid., 618.

policies that stripped American Indians of their way of life. For Native Wild West performers like Luther Standing Bear, it was obvious that this did not match up.[62]

Pawnee Bill's Wild West show endeavored to teach white Americans about life on the western frontier, but the perception of the American West Pawnee Bill's show presented to easterners was far from reality. Native Americans were not passive, exploited "obstacles to progress," nor cowboys the heroes who could outride the wind, contrary to the imagery the show used. This view spread widely, however, largely because of the railroads and the entertainment success of the show. The new railroads eased travel and the exchange of ideas, thereby shrinking the nation, and Pawnee Bill effectively used railway travel to move his spectacle from one town to the next. In each town, thousands attended the two daily shows and eagerly soaked up the biased perception of the American West portrayed therein. Behind the scenes, Pawnee Bill's show was a large and dangerous operation. Dozens of cast and crewmembers were involved, and regardless of the supposed ease of travel, the crew left many behind in a previous town by mistake, pushed others off moving trains as a joke, and were injured in every conceivable way in the arena.

Yet, since they risked life and limb daily, we must assume that the cast and crew found the experience worthwhile. What, then, were the *opportunities* gained through involvement with Pawnee Bill's Historic Wild West? For many different groups, employment in Pawnee Bill's Historic Wild West meant opportunity, whether societal, cultural, or economic.

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[62] Deloria, *Playing Indian*, 181-4.

Have Split Skirt, Will Travel:

May Lillie and the Beautiful Daring Western Girls

> "Let any normally healthy woman who is ordinarily strong screw up her courage and tackle a bucking bronco, and she will find the most fascinating pastime in the field of feminine athletic endeavor…and once accomplished, she'll have more real fun than any pink tea or theater party or ballroom ever yielded."
>
> – May Lillie, showman, 1907

Imagine. You've just spent the last hour brushing your horse to a high gleam; there's not a speck of dust on him. You proudly mount up, vaulting yourself with the easy grace that comes from *far* too much practice into your new saddle, the leather practically glowing and edged with round conchos shining like stars in the sky. You adjust the bottom hem of the bright green split skirt you just hand-tailored around your high-top boots; the color becomes you, you think. You sit proud and tall, maybe even a little smug, and tug on the reins just *so* to make Charcoal put a little prance in his step as you guide him to the beginning of the parade. You're certain all the people who see you will be incredibly impressed…

… Until you notice some of the ladies looking at you with scorn in their eyes. Why could it be? You wonder, but don't drop the smile from your face, because you're a *showman*, and it doesn't matter. But you wonder. Finally, you catch one woman whispering to her friends, and she points at your split skirt. "So that's it," you realize. They're the conservative type around here, and don't like women riding astride. "How stupid," you think. "It's only practical. Why, if I tried to ride in a full skirt I'd break my neck!"

Pawnee Bill employed Euro-American women in his Historic Wild West from the start, mainly as riders to perform in races and the ever-popular Mexican Contra Dance on Horseback. For these women, employment in the show was an opportunity to work for pay, travel with their husbands, and, most importantly, to push the boundaries of society. The "Beautiful Daring Western Girls," as they were called, helped to change the acceptable riding style, clothing, and pastimes for women. May Lillie, Pawnee Bill's wife, was a tiny woman with a strong personality and was one such lady.

May Manning Lillie was born in Philadelphia in 1869. She met Pawnee Bill while he was on tour with Cody's show in 1884. They corresponded for two years and were married on August 31, 1886, when he was twenty-six years of age and she seventeen. His wedding gift to her was a pony and a Marlin .22 rifle. She was a small woman, weighing only 110 pounds, but nonetheless had a large personality.[1] She filled the need for a lady sharpshooter in the show, performing as "the World's Greatest Lady Horseback Shot."[2] For one of her acts, she and Pawnee Bill would demonstrate rifle practice, each holding targets for the other. For another, Pawnee Bill would rapidly throw glass balls in the air while May sped by on horseback, shooting and breaking them before they could hit the ground. While on tour, she often gave shooting exhibitions. One such was at the Pennsylvania State Rifle Range in November 1889, when she shot twenty-four out of twenty-five targets at 200 yards. Critics raved it was the "best score ever made by a lady at this range of shooting."[3] Later, in September 1901 in Grundy Center, Iowa, she bettered her score. The route book for that year states she "created a record here in her shooting act at both performances, breaking 24 out of a possible 24."[4]

May was an excellent equestrian in addition to a premier sharpshooter. A strong advocate of horseback riding for women, she stated there was no healthier exercise for them.[5] She herself was always careful to ride sidesaddle in full skirts, as she realized that acting like a proper Victorian lady had several advantages. A lady abided by many rules

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[1] "Just May," *Tulsa Tribune*, 18 September, 1936; "Mrs. May Lillie, 65, Showwoman, Dies," *New York Times*, 18 September, 1936.

[2] Reddin, *Wild West Shows*, 153.

[3] "The Great Show," *Evening Herald*, 1891.

[4] Nicodemus and Wilson, *Season 1901*, 62.

[5] "Pawnee Bill in Wild West Show," *The Times Dispatch*, 1906.

of etiquette that allowed her to keep her life and environment under strict control, which could be quite useful while on tour. It protected her from slurs and slights directed at show women. Finally, Victorian ladies were of the upper class, so she could associate with the best people. The dual image of May Lillie tested and broadened the limits of the Victorian "women's sphere," but since she clung to the concept of ladyhood, society saw her efforts as respectable.[6]

In contrast to her own actions, May did not consider riding astride as immodest. Indeed, she told a Virginia paper in 1906 riding astride had many redeeming features about it, particularly for beginners.[7] While on tour in Chicago in May 1907, she spoke to a group of ladies and delivered what is perhaps her most famous quote on the subject:

> Let any normally healthy woman who is ordinarily strong screw up her courage and tackle a bucking bronco, and she will find the most fascinating pastime in the field of feminine athletic endeavor. There is nothing to compare, to increase the joy of living, and once accomplished she'll have more real fun than any pink tea or theater party or ballroom ever yielded.[8]

By this excerpt, it is obvious May Lillie genuinely enjoyed her Western lifestyle and time as a Wild West performer. She experienced the personal validation of having fun while facing one's fears and advocated to others that they do the same. Significantly, she encourages "athletic endeavor[s]." She seems to believe that modern women have moved beyond demure activities such as tea parties, and are able to do much more.

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[6] Riley, *The Life and Legacy of Annie Oakley*, 112.

[7] "Pawnee Bill in Wild West Show," *The Times Dispatch*, 1906.

[8] Wood-Clark, *Beautiful Daring Western Girls,* 5.

As authors have pointed out before, however, it is important to realize that the ability of some women to outshoot or outride men sincerely threatened men. Therefore, by casting such strong women as performers Euro-American males could contain such female power as a spectacle with a beginning, middle, and, most importantly, a definite end.[9]

[9] L. Clare Bratten, "Shootout at the Gender Corral: Annie Oakley Deconstructs Gender," *Children's Literature Association Quarterly* 22, no. 1 (Spring 1997): 9.

Gordon and May.

A photograph of Pawnee Bill and May taken shortly after their wedding, 1886.[10]

May Horseback

A postcard image of May enjoying horseback riding; even riding sidesaddle she could perform difficult tricks, such as making her horse rear.[11]

[10] Photo courtesy Oklahoma Historical Society.

[11] Photo courtesy Oklahoma Historical Society.

Although an advocate of women in western pastimes, May was no stranger to the danger that went along with it. In October 1898, in Athens, Ohio, she injured two fingers in the rifle practice act. While holding a target for her husband, a bullet struck the iron plate on the back of the target, rebounded, and lacerated several of her fingers.[12] The next year, in Haverstraw, New York, the same thing happened again. This time, the injury was so severe it forced the show's physician to amputate the last two fingers on her right hand.[13] When barely a month later she stepped off the train and severely sprained her ankle, she earned the sympathy of the route book writer, who (under)stated, "May is in hard luck."[14]

A few injuries did not stop her, however; not even her disappointment with her husband's choice of business partners could do so. When Pawnee Bill joined Buffalo Bill to create the Two Bill's Show in 1908, May disapproved and refused to continue touring. She chose instead to stay at home to manage their bison ranch in Pawnee, Oklahoma, a formidable task requiring her to supervise a large number of cowboys and shuffle numerous duties.[15] She had a grand time "bossing the outfit," as she said, and was the only woman in the world to manage a bison ranch.[16]

While in Pawnee, she suffered the loss of her first-born child; because of complications, she was no longer able to bear children. Therefore, in 1917 they adopted a

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[12] Wilson, *Season 1898* 105-6.

[13] Wilson, *Season 1899*, 72.

[14] Wilson, *Season 1899*, 79.

[15] "Just May," *Tulsa Tribune*, 18 September, 1936; Shirley, *Pawnee Bill*, 180-181.

[16] Pawnee Bill Ranch and Museum, Pawnee, Oklahoma, May Lillie exhibit.

baby boy and named him Gordon William Lillie, Jr. — or just Billy, for short.[17] Billy had the run of the ranch. He had his own horse and saddle, and his pets were bison, chickens, and even a baby black bear.[18] To entertain Billy and his friends for Billy's eighth birthday in 1925, his father's friends and former performers staged a miniature Wild West show.[19] One of the acts in the show was a "hanging" of a horse thief, which may or may not have been the impetus for the resulting disaster. A few days later, Billy died in an accident on the ranch when he tried to recreate the act and measured the rope incorrectly.[20]

May was devastated and never got over the loss of her children. In contrast to her many public accomplishments, privately she still wanted to adhere to the Victorian belief of women as mothers. Even years later the tragedy led her to muse:

> Now as I celebrate our Golden Anniversary, I wonder why it is so easy to win the applause of the multitudes and so hard just to be a mother. I only realize that the show must go on regardless of what is behind the smile the audience sees.[21]

Gordon and May celebrated their Fiftieth Wedding Anniversary in 1936 in Taos, New Mexico, by renewing their vows. Admirers presented the Lillies with a gold-colored

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[17] "Just May," *Tulsa Tribune*, 18 September 1936; "Major and Mrs. Lillie Adopt a Son," *Pawnee Courier-Dispatch and Times-Democrat,* 18 January 1917.

[18] Pawnee Bill Ranch and Museum, Pawnee , OK, "Ranch Images" exhibit.

[19] "Billie (sic) Lillie Celebrates 8th Birthday," *Pawnee Courier-Dispatch and Times Democrat*, n.d., Billy Collection, Box C, Pawnee Bill Ranch and Museum Archives, Pawnee, OK.

[20] "Billie (sic) Lillie Meets Sudden Death," *Pawnee Courier-Dispatch and Times Democrat,* 2 April 1925.

[21] Pawnee Bill Ranch and Museum, May Lillie exhibit.

car. Upon returning from Tulsa a few weeks later, Gordon wrecked the car. May died three days later because of injuries sustained during the wreck.[22]

[22] "Mrs. Lillie is Little Better," *Daily Oklahoman*, 16 September 1936; "Mrs. May Lillie, 65, Showwoman, Dies," *New York Times*, 18 September 1936; "Pawnee Bill, Wife Injured in Car Crash," *Daily Oklahoman*, 14 September 1936.

A family photo of Gordon, May, and Billy Lillie, 1917.

Note that May's right hand is hidden. She lost the last two fingers in a shooting accident, and self-consciously hid that hand in photos ever after.[23]

[23] Photo courtesy Oklahoma Historical Society.

An inspection of the available secondary sources regarding the Wild West show cowgirls reveals a dearth of scholarly work, despite a wealth of museum collections and archival materials. Sarah Wood-Clark's *Beautiful Daring Western Girls* brings many of the available sources together and offers an overview of the topic.[24] Glenda Riley's seminal biography of Annie Oakley details the sharpshooter's days in the show, her public affairs outside the arena, and her legacy as a "cowgirl."[25] Paul Reddin's 1999 *Wild West Shows* offers a valid overview of the Wild West show enterprise and touches on the experiences of the early cowgirls.[26] Interestingly, as informative as each of these sources are, they each contain only a one-sentence mention of May Lillie; as the premier sharpshooter in Pawnee Bill's Historic Wild West, she deserves more. To find information regarding May Lillie, the researcher must scour route books and newspaper accounts of the day.

In the Victorian era, the "women's sphere" was the home. Society expected women to marry, bear and rear children, be religious, and maintain a neat, fashionable home.[27] Near the end of the era, however, many regarded themselves as "new women;" robust and independent citizens who could work and vote.[28] This change was certainly true for those women who sought jobs in the entertainment business, such as with Pawnee Bill's Historic Wild West. These women rode bucking broncos, roped calves, and shot just as well as any man. The notion that such a creature could exist was so new

[24] Wood-Clark, *Beautiful Daring Western Girls*.

[25] Riley, *The Life and Legacy of Annie Oakley*.

[26] Reddin, *Wild West Shows*.

[27] Ibid., *Wild West Shows*, 141; Wood-Clark, *Beautiful Daring Western Girls*, 3.

[28] Reddin, *Wild West Shows*, 141.

that even the show organizers did not know what to call them. They billed these females variously as "broncho-riding women," "Wild West Girls," "Western Prairie Girls," "Western Girl Rough Riders," and "Rancheras." Pawnee Bill seemed to prefer "Lady Riders" and the cumbersome-yet-poetic "Beautiful Daring Western Girls." The most descriptive and lasting label, however, was merely "cow-girl."[29]

Despite the many hardships, such as an inherently dangerous, tiring job with no security and low pay, these early cowgirls had many roles in the Wild West, and therefore many reasons for joining. The opportunity for any work at all was not common for Victorian women; the chance to draw equal pay as men was unheard of in the nineteenth century.[30] Some women merely wished to travel with their husbands. These women were often conned into playing the victims in the "Attack on the Emigrant Train," a short act that did not require the western skills of riding, roping, or shooting, as the emigrants were afoot and unarmed. Some ladies were stars in their own right, however, such as sharpshooters May Lillie, Annie Oakley, and Lillian Smith. In later years, the cast included the highly respected lady bronc riders.[31] Although performers included single ladies who had to be chaperoned, and a few married couples with children, most female performers were married and childless. The show organizers tried to house the couples together with as much privacy as possible.[32]

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[29] Ibid., 142; Riley, *The Life and Legacy of Annie Oakley*, 163.

[30] Wood-Clark, *Beautiful Daring Western Girls,* 6.

[31] Blackstone, *Buckskins, Bullets, and Business,* 80.

[32] Ibid., 80; Riley, *The Life and Legacy of Annie Oakley*, 160; Wood-Clark, *Beautiful Daring Western Girls,* 22.

Because they were women involved in a man's work, early cowgirls greatly confused Victorian society. Therefore, early cowgirls earned various receptions in the press. Publicity was sometimes quite positive, such as when a 1914 New York newspaper called cowgirls from the 101 Ranch of Oklahoma the "sauciest, happiest, loveliest assemblage of femininity imaginable."[33] Indeed, 101 Ranch cowgirls advocated themselves to the papers, one girl even saying that life on the plains made women healthy, able to overcome injury, and aided their breathing and endurance.[34] Many people, however, considered the cowgirls as threats to the conventional view of women as a civilizing influence. To many, cowgirls were not "lovely" or "healthy;" they were unfeminine and sought to mimic, or even *be,* men. Attempting to counter this negativity, Wild West show publicity described these women as "prairie beauties" and downplayed the masculine associations of the work they did. Show publicists argued the cowgirls were "simply lively, athletic young women… with a realization that in affairs where skill is the chief qualification she has an equal chance with her brothers."[35] Of course, this notion in and of itself was shocking to Victorian sensibilities, but apparently show organizers judged it the lesser of two evils.

With the advent of the "New Woman" in society, those women who advocated for suffrage and the right to work, Wild West show programs denied the plausibility of the idea that their cowgirls could be of their ilk. They pointed out that Wild West cowgirls wore long skirts and most rode sidesaddle; those rare few who rode astride did so only

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[33] As quoted in Reddin, *Wild West Shows,* 171.

[34] Ibid., *Wild West Shows,* 171.

[35] Wood-Clark, *Beautiful Daring Western Girls,* 6-7.

out of a concern for safety. By the mid-1890s, however, this argument no longer held up, and the negative press intensified. Most cowgirls wore split skirts, which soon transformed into bloomers. Seeing a sidesaddle was rare, and many women became more muscled as they participated in bronc riding and bulldogging.[36]

Buffalo Bill Cody's own view of women is notoriously difficult to pin down. Sometimes, he advocated for the "new woman." In the 1899 program, for example, he endorsed suffrage, the same employment opportunities as men, and the right to live alone without restrictions.[37] At other times, he seemingly contradicted himself by stating that women should not wear bloomers or ride broncos. He advocated the supposed civilizing effect of women in the 1902 program, stating that western "women, in their heroic courage and endurance, afforded a splendid example of devotion and self-sacrifice."[38] As for the "Western Prairie Girls" themselves, if they addressed audience reaction at all most recalled admiration, not social alienation.[39]

Along the show route, cowgirls enjoyed relatively equal treatment; if they could do a job, their superiors often assigned it; they filled in wherever they could help; they performed the same feats of horsemanship as the men. The western prairie girls were involved in most aspects of the show; but they are often conspicuously absent from the programs.[40] However, females were always present. The early performers were only actors portraying traditional domestic women, such as "Ma" in the Attack on the Settler's

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[36] Riley, *The Life and Legacy of Annie Oakley,* 161.

[37] As quoted in Reddin, *Wild West Shows,* 141.

[38] Ibid., *Wild West Shows,* 141.

[39] Wood-Clark, *Beautiful Daring Western Girls,* 21.

[40] Blackstone, *Buckskins, Bullets, and Business,* 83-85.

Cabin. Later, horsewomen rode in races and in the Quadrille (or Virginia Reel, or Mexican Contra Dance) on Horseback; a genteel, yet nevertheless fast-paced act that required much skill. During the 1880s, few women were spotlighted in performances, but soon sharpshooters such as May Lillie, Annie Oakley, and Lillian Smith caught the public's eye and helped ease others into the casts.[41] By the mid-1890s, women regularly performed as bronc riders, trick riders, fancy ropers, or sharpshooters.[42] One author estimates that women consisted roughly 10% of the cast of a Wild West show.[43]

The Wild West shows offered eastern audiences a dichotomous perception of western women. Cody's, and later Lillie's, enterprises seemed to say that women could be something more than merely objects to be rescued. Wild West shows helped introduce the "pioneer woman" into the myth of the American West. The heroine of the West, however, was never as clearly defined as the hero; the Wild West show did not portray *all* women as cowgirls, the female counterpart to the masculine cowboy. As previously mentioned, women needed to be protected during the Attack on the Emigrant Train. Euro-American men needed to rescue their women from Indian captors. Only pretty, young, genteel ladies could perform the Mexican Contra Dance on Horseback. Show organizers found it too difficult to reconcile the gentle passive lady who rode sidesaddle in full skirts and required protection, with the competent active woman who rode astride in bloomers and could protect herself. It was too difficult to reconcile the need for someone for the heroic cowboy to rescue with the emerging realization that Western

[41] Wood-Clark, *Beautiful Daring Western Girls,* 18.

[42] Ibid., 19.

[43] Ibid., 21.

women had shared equally the dangers of the West, and in the process became quite capable.[44] Therefore, Wild West show women found themselves split into two dichotomous camps. There was the ultra-feminine "prairie flower," and the "hard-as-nails" woman too closely associated with rough western men. Individual performers felt this stretch into two opposing directions all too keenly. For example, one performer's mother told her that no matter what she did she should always be a lady.[45]

The question then becomes how to merge proficiency in a masculine profession with Victorian feminine gentility? In an effort to do so, cowgirls met some gender norms and rejected others. They were all athletes in a traditionally masculine sport, but they all kept their Victorian manners and pastimes, such as visiting and embroidery. Riding style and modes of dress became another indicator of their conservatism or lack thereof.[46]

As women more commonly involved themselves in risky equestrian activities, they began to modify their riding style. Riding astride shocked audiences and defied social conventions; not only did society consider it immodest, but indeed, many Victorians believed it to be harmful to feminine reproductive systems.[47] Wild West show publicists carefully explained that women rode astride for comfort, safety, and the freedom of movement necessary on the prairie.[48] They emphasized its usefulness and practicality. After all, on the open range cowgirls needed to be able to gallop "flat-out,"

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[44] Blackstone, *Buckskins, Bullets, and Business,* 129-30.

[45] Wood-Clark, *Beautiful Daring Western Girls,* 7.

[46] Laegreid, *Riding Pretty,* 11-13.

[47] Riley, *The Life and Legacy of Annie Oakley,* 161; Wood-Clark, *Beautiful Daring Western Girls,* 11.

[48] Wood-Clark, *Beautiful Daring Western Girls,* 11.

and needed a sturdy anchor for roping and shooting while doing so.[49] By 1900, ladies riding astride were so common saddle-makers produced a special saddle for ladies (although, perhaps production began in an effort to keep some gentility in the endeavor). The new saddle had a padded seat and a heavy "squaw roll" of padding across the front. These proved extremely unpopular, however, and most photographs from the era depict women using men's lighter roping saddles.[50] Cowgirls seemed all too eager to abandon the sidesaddle. A 101 Ranch cowgirl told a New York City newspaper in 1914 they were impractical and uncomfortable, and "should be relegated to the oblivion of the hoop skirt of our grandmothers."[51]

Since most women now rode astride, long, heavy, full skirts had to change as well. In the late 1880s, women wore ankle-length divided riding skirts, or "split skirts;" essentially pants so the ladies could ride astride, they were full and appeared to be a skirt while on the ground. With their new split skirts, women wore shirtwaist blouses and tall riding boots. Later, however, many women took in the many folds of extra fabric, shortened the skirts to the mid-calf or knee, and added elastic to the hem, thereby fashioning impromptu bloomers. This allowed them to ride without the fear of the flying cloth being caught in the horses' tack. With their bloomers, they wore leggings and

[49] Laegreid, *Riding Pretty*, 15.

[50] Riley, *The Life and Legacy of Annie Oakley*, 161; Wood-Clark, *Beautiful Daring Western Girls*, 11.

[51] As quoted in Reddin, *Wild West Shows*, 171-2.

shirtwaists.[52] Many women wore a wide brimmed cowboy's hat to keep the sun out of their eyes, and high-heeled boots so that their feet would not slip through the stirrups.[53]

Most women sewed their own clothes, as tailors did not know how to make their newfangled split skirts.[54] Early cowgirls designed their clothes in a specific way. Not only were they practical, but they tried to reassure traditionalists that the wearer remained feminine.[55] The bright colors and elegant cut made it easier to distinguish the female performers. In fact, the constant travel meant cowgirls had many opportunities to visit eastern cities' textile mills to pick out new, brightly colored material. Just like women of today, they gloried in it. Tad Lucas, an early cowgirl, stated she and her friends "had lots of clothes. We always wore our best clothes no matter what we were doing."[56]

Women found various types of work in Wild West shows. For example, female bronc riders first appeared in Buffalo Bill's Wild West in 1887, and he employed at least one in every year after that. Furthermore, no evidence suggests they ever rode different horses than the men, or tied their stirrups together as females in rodeo did in the early 1900s.[57]

Lucille Mulhall was one of the many women who found fame along the show route; however, it is important to realize she, like May Lillie and Annie Oakley, carefully maintained her femininity. Indeed, that may well be the reason the public received them

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[52] Wood-Clark, *Beautiful Daring Western Girls,* 12.

[53] Reddin, *Wild West Shows,* 172; Wood-Clark, *Beautiful Daring Western Girls,* 12.

[54] Wood-Clark, *Beautiful Daring Western Girls,* 12.

[55] Laegreid, *Riding Pretty,* 12.

[56] Wood-Clark, *Beautiful Daring Western Girls,* 12-13.

[57] Blackstone, *Buckskins, Bullets, and Business,* 68.

so well. For example, Lucille Mulhall of Oklahoma joined the 101 Ranch in 1905 and many call her the first "cowgirl."[58] Mulhall played to her womanly physique; she was tall and slender for the time, at 5'7" and 120 pounds, and kept her long blonde hair tied back with a ribbon. She emphasized her lady-like manners: she was soft-spoken, reserved, and considerate.[59] She wore split skirts so she could ride astride, but they purposefully cut them long and made them out of satin-finished broadcloth in bright colors like hunter green, gold, or leaf brown.[60] Nonetheless, Mulhall was a tough steer rider, and a horse trainer of magnificent skill.[61]

Like Mulhall and Lillie, Annie Oakley carefully crafted her public, proper, Victorian lady persona, and due to her excellent marketing skills and exceptional sharpshooting talent, she is perhaps the most famous Wild West show woman. Born Phoebe Ann Moses in 1860, she married Frank Butler sometime between the mid-1870s and 1882. Ten years her senior and already an experienced sharpshooting showman, he knew exactly how to market her to audiences.[62] In private, Annie took the surname Butler, but onstage she always used Annie Oakley, likely because she needed a strong surname.[63] The couple auditioned for Buffalo Bill Cody's show in March 1885 and was hired on the spot.[64] She performed with Buffalo Bill for seventeen years, from 1885 to

[58] Ibid., 144; Beth Day, *America's First Cowgirl: Lucille Mulhall* (New York: Julian Messner, Inc., 1995), 145.

[59] Day, *America's First Cowgirl,* 114.

[60] Ibid., 14.

[61] Ibid., 102.

[62] Riley, *The Life and Legacy of Annie Oakley*, 3, 17.

[63] Ibid., 20.

[64] Ibid., 30-31.

1901, only leaving to join Pawnee Bill's Historic Wild West for the 1888 season because of the intense—and very public, since the newspapers gleefully took up the story—rivalry between herself and sharpshooter Lillian Smith during the previous season in Europe.[65] Oakley described her situation later: "There was I facing the real Wild West, the first white woman to travel with what society might have considered an impossible outfit."[66]

From this quotation, Annie Oakley realized her potentially precarious situation. Cody initially hired Oakley for a specific purpose: he wanted to attract more women and families to his show, and realized that women could not be simple victims *all* the time. Women and girls needed someone to identify with, someone to admire. Annie Oakley fit the bill nicely. She exhibited talent, skill, and grace while doing man's work.[67]

However graceful she might have been, Oakley was still doing what most considered man's work. Therefore, Butler and Oakley carefully crafted her public, proper, Victorian persona. She always made her own clothes and *never* wore pants, jewelry, or make-up, instead favoring an ankle-length dress of elegant cut but plain fabric in blue or tan. She wore her hair loose and flowing down her back and, like Mulhall, played up her petite figure; she was only 5' and 110 pounds. She always rode sidesaddle, and stated that riding astride was a "horrid idea." She enjoyed doing fancy embroidery between shows and often entertained European statesmen at tea in her tent. This all

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[65] Blackstone, *Buckskins, Bullets, and Business,* 60; Riley, *The Life and Legacy of Annie Oakley*, 45, 118.

[66] Riley, *The Life and Legacy of Annie Oakley*, 30-1.

[67] Ibid., 158-9.

fostered her image as tiny, dainty, girlish, and lady-like.[68] To illustrate further her proper Victorian outlook, she always used her husband and dog as her assistants in the arena. This showed an emphasis on family, domesticity, and familial trust, because with the slightest mishap she could shoot and maim either of them.[69] For example, she shot ash off her husband's cigarette, a dime from between his fingers, and an apple off her poodle George's head.[70]

Like Lillie, Oakley tenaciously clung to the Victorian concept of womanhood. Oakley advocated learning to shoot as an agreeable form of exercise for women, but was sure to draw the line before dressing like men or neglecting their womanly duties at home. For example, in 1897, she stated, "I don't like bloomers or bloomer women, but I think that sport and healthful exercise make women better, healthier, and happier."[71]

Although women like May Lillie and Annie Oakley certainly were two of the most famous women to tour with Wild West shows, they were hardly the only ones. The annual route books for Pawnee Bill's Historic Wild West detail the Beautiful Daring Western Girls with the show. In 1895, five filled the cast, at least two of whom were married. In addition to riding in the Ladies Race and the Mexican Contra Dance on Horseback, they also served as ticket takers. There was also Mrs. Viola Shaw, wife of Captain A.G. Shaw, author of the route book for that year and interpreter for the Sioux Indians. Viola, in fact, was part Sioux, and she and her husband performed in the

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[68] Ibid. 21-2, 114, 116, 123-4.

[69] Blackstone, *Buckskins, Bullets, and Business,* 105.

[70] Ibid., 60.

[71] Ibid., 141.

Impalement Act as knife and battleax throwers.[72] Five ladies rode in 1898, as well, including Shaw. The women performed much more varied acts in this year. Another married woman, Letty Adell, joined the cast this year and helped with the Impalement Act. Nellie Braddon was assisted by her husband Buckskin Harry in the Whip Act and the Chariot Race.[73] In 1899, Shaw and Adell returned. This year, Adell got in touch with her inner actress: she played Trapper Tom's Daughter in the finale, the Attack on the Settler's Cabin. Four other lady riders filled out the Ladies Race this year, three of whom were also married; Kate Butler's husband William worked as an Annex ticket seller, Aggie McCallen's husband was a cowboy, and Tessie De Foe's husband played in the concert.[74] In 1900, the Shaws, the Adells, and the Butlers all returned to the show cast. Five other ladies joined the cast, as well: among whom was Blanche Hastrawser, who was injured so many times that season that she did not return for 1901, and Nellie Connors, who apparently had so much fun that she did.[75] 1901 was the year for married cowgirls; Letty Adell and her husband returned for 1901, but another cowgirl, Pearl Foster, married to the Superintendent of Canvas, took over the Chariot Race. Blanche McKinney's husband was a cowboy, and Mamie Skipper met and married her husband, one of seven in the detachment of the 9th US Cavalry employed by the show that year, along the show route.[76]

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[72] Shaw, *Season 1895*, 14, 66.

[73] Wilson, *Season 1898*, 4, 36, 42, 44.

[74] Wilson, *Season 1899*, 30.

[75] Nicodemus and Wilson, *Season 1901*, 18.

[76] Ibid., 18, 22.

By this examination of the route book cast lists, we can determine many things about the experiences of the Euro-American women in Pawnee Bill's Historic Wild West. First, as we have already stated, most of the women were married to husbands also employed in the show. Most husbands were just as skilled as their wives were, such as Buckskin Harry (Braddon), a cowboy, pickup man, trick rider, Roman rider, chariot racer, and whip artist. Some others, such as William Butler, worked at unskilled jobs like ticket selling. Many couples, such as the Shaws, Adells, and Butlers, became loyal to the show and continued to perform with Pawnee Bill for years.

Euro-American women along the show route faced the same challenges as anyone else. Many fell ill with cholera or malaria.[77] Close calls abounded, such as when Buckskin Harry's chariot wheel fell off while he and Nellie were racing, and he continued the entire race without knowing anything about it.[78] Horses often fell. Letty Adell's horse fell twice in 1898; she was unhurt the first time, but badly injured the second. In 1900, Blanche Hastrawser "got the first fall of the season" in the Ladies' Race on the third day of the show, and fell again in the same act two weeks later, severely injuring herself.[79] Horses ran into each other, as well. During the Grand Entry in July 1895, Viola Shaw's horse ran into one of the Mexicans' horses and knocked them both off.[80] In August 1898, Mrs. Shaw and Ida Murphey ran into each other during the ladies' race, knocking them both to the ground and Mrs. Murphey unconscious.[81] In June 1901,

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[77] Shaw, *Season 1895,* 55, 69-70, 90.

[78] Wilson, *Season 1898,* 84.

[79] Wilson and Nicodemus, *Season 1900,* 41.

[80] Shaw, *Season 1895,* 65.

[81] Wilson, *Season 1898,* 86.

Lizzie Smart's horse ran into cowboy Oliver Provost's, and she was hurt so badly someone had to carry her from the arena.[82] We can see even genteel acts such as the Ladies Race and the Mexican Contra Dance on Horseback were perilous and required much skill to perform… and survive.

Sometimes a performer was unable to go on. At times like these, ladies filled in when a fellow performer was too ill or injured to perform… and not only in acts to which they were accustomed. Clio, the snake charmer in the Annex, fell ill twice in 1898 and could not perform; Mrs. Adell and Mrs. Shaw handled the snakes in her place, and did so quite well, according to the route book.[83] Perhaps the funniest instance of a cast member filling in for another came in August 1895, as follows:

> During the impalement act Viola, who assists Capt. Shaw in the act, after commencing the act would not come back. Chief Standing Bear's son was called to fill her place. Pawnee Bill said, "do [sic] not hit her with your fist, use a club and send her home."[84]

This quotation certainly illustrates either a lack of chivalry or the impetuous of equality, depending on one's point of view. On one hand, we can read this as Pawnee Bill's mistreatment of a lady. Surely, she had a good reason for leaving the act unfinished; perhaps she was hurt in some way; perhaps she sought to make a politicalized statement that she was important and not *just* an assistant; perhaps she had sudden intense doubt regarding Captain Shaw's ability to hurl an axe near her head without hitting it. On the other hand, we can also read this as an example of Pawnee Bill's equal treatment of

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[82] Nicodemus and Wilson, *Season 1901*, 42.

[83] Wilson, *Season 1898*, 72, 88.

[84] Shaw, *Season 1895*, 81.

the female performers. If a male performer had ruined an act in such a selfish way he would have faced severe consequences.

Viola Shaw, 1895.

Mrs. Viola Shaw toured with Pawnee Bill's Historic Wild West for many years with her husband performing as a lady rider and in the Impalement Act.[85]

[85] Photo from Shaw, *Season 1895,* 66.

Women with the show always found time to be Victorian ladies, however. Shopping excursions abounded, such as in July 1899 when they went to New York and led the route book to lament afterwards, "Trunks have increased in weight wonderfully."[86] Fashion-forward May Lillie bought a new hat in September 1901, much admired by the other ladies.[87] Sometimes the shopping was for tack and supplies; ladies bought new saddles and the Shaws and Adells had their impalement knives plated.[88]

Shopping trips were not the only excursions the ladies made, however. In 1899, a number of people went to see Plymouth Rock; Gordon and May used the opportunity to go clamming on the beach, and were quite successful.[89] Mr. and Mrs. Lillie also took a large party of cast members and visitors out boating on a river in Minnesota in June 1901.[90]

A common Victorian ritual, ladies did not neglect to "call" on friends along the show route. Ladies often asked for leaves of absence to visit friends or family.[91] Sometimes family or friends visited the performers in the show, doubtless providing an exhilarating experience for them.[92] May Lillie made a point to either visit her parents or have them come visit her at least once a year while on tour.[93] Mr. and Mrs. Lillie used the

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[86] Wilson *Season 1899*. See also Nicodemus and Wilson, *Season 1901*, 42; Wilson and Nicodemus, *Season 1900*, 91, 93.

[87] Nicodemus and Wilson, *Season 1901*, 64.

[88] Shaw, 42-3; Wilson, *Season 1898*, 76, 84.

[89] Wilson, *Season 1899*, 64.

[90] Nicodemus and Wilson, *Season 1901*, 40.

[91] Shaw, *Season 1895*, 46; Wilson, *Season 1899*, 77.

[92] Shaw, *Season 1895*, 52, 86.

[93] Ibid., 52; Wilson, *Season 1898*, 52; Wilson and Nicodemus, *1900*, 41.

societal custom as publicity for their show, often eating dinner with local politicians or prominent citizens.[94]

Another Victorian custom led many men to bestow gifts upon the women. In August 1895, Pawnee Bill presented each of the lady riders with a bouquet of flowers during the parade.[95] May Lillie was presented with a basket of flowers after her shooting act in August 1898 in Bloomington, Illinois, Pawnee Bill's hometown.[96] On her birthday, Mrs. R.B. Smith's husband gave her $100 in gold, and the grandstand canvas men with whom her husband worked gave her a silk umbrella.[97] When Charles White and his wife left the show in August 1898, May Lillie gave her a purse, Viola Shaw gifted her with a jeweled hat pin, and the rest of the ladies got together to give her a box of handkerchiefs as a good-bye memento.[98]

Romance abounded along the show route, as well, especially in 1901. That year, six couples married during the season. Harry Skipper, a member of the US 9th Cavalry detachment, married cowgirl and physician's assistant Mamie Lawrence on 7 July; sometime soon after that, Millie "Clio" Egypt, the snake charmer and Annex dancer, secretly married cowboy George Malone.[99] On 27 July, Dr. W.I. Swain, the show's physician, married Miss Ryan, a Chicagoan unaffiliated with the show.[100] On 4 August,

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[94] Wilson, *1898*, 99, 103.

[95] Shaw, *Season 1895*, 71.

[96] Wilson, *1898*, 85.

[97] Ibid., 82.

[98] Ibid., 92.

[99] Nicodemus and Wilson, *1901*, 46.

[100] Ibid., 52.

James Harto, the assistant Annex orator, married snake charmer Catherine Wren.[101] On 11 August, Charles Humberstone, another of the US Cavalrymen, married May Herbert, seemingly also unaffiliated with the show.[102] Finally, on 31 August, Pawnee Bill's good friend Jose "Mexican Joe" Barrera married his wife Effie, on Pawnee Bill and May's own anniversary.[103]

Of course, marital discord sometimes reigned, as well. In 1895, the day after the aforementioned Impalement Act fiasco, in fact, Captain Shaw and his wife Viola got into a heated argument. Shaw wrote in the route book that day, "Viola and I divided our clothes out of the big trunk, but made a new arrangement and clothes were assigned to same trunk again."[104]

In conclusion, Pawnee Bill employed Euro-American women in his Historic Wild West from the start, mainly as riders to perform in races and the ever-popular Mexican Contra Dance on Horseback. Many women, such as Viola Shaw, Letty Adell, Nellie Braddon, and Katie Butler, were married and most likely saw employment in the Wild West show as an opportunity to work for pay and travel with their husbands. Whether they realized it or not, however, they also helped to push the boundaries of society. The "Beautiful Daring Western Girls," as they were called, were skilled equestrian athletes who performed tricky maneuvers. In order to conduct their work, it was easier to ride astride (a position that shocked Victorians) and which required split skirts (a new and similarly scandalous garment). Some women, such as Annie Oakley and May Lillie,

[101] Ibid., 54.

[102] Ibid., 56.

[103] Ibid., 62.

[104] Shaw, *Season 1895*, 82.

earned top billing as sharpshooters, and advocated shooting and riding, respectively, as healthful pastimes for women, thereby pushing boundaries even further. The public was less adverse to their efforts because they made certain to cling to conventional Victorian social norms, such as wearing full skirts, riding sidesaddle, and remaining, at least to the public eye, gentle and dependent on their husbands. After leaving show business, May ran her bison ranch in Pawnee, Oklahoma, proving once and for all she was a strong character in her own right.

Same Traditions, New Reasons:

Experiences of American Indian Women in Pawnee Bill's Wild West Shows

> "Elizabeth, New Jersey, Sunday, May 13
>
> …First "Hey Rube" of the season. A mob of intoxicated Italians started throwing stones at the Indians, who entered spiritedly into the fray… When the dust cleared away the victorious aborigines were returning in triumph to their wigwams, while several swarthy sons of sunny Italy were being ignominiously carted away to the hospital."
>
> -excerpt from *The Official Route Book of the Pawnee Bill Wild West Show, Season 1900.*

Imagine. You awake in the early morning hours, and the cold seeps around the doorway, causing you to dress quickly in a cloth dress and your grandmother's necklace. You cook eggs for breakfast and wake your children and husband, pulling the lot of them out of bed with equal difficulty. After your meal, your husband and children go out while you tidy the house and prepare for your day. You finally step outside…

… into the midst of a chaotic landscape full of American cowboys in leather chinks and Mexican vaqueros with large jangling silver spurs, horses and bulls of every color, wagons, stagecoaches, and train cars creaking and moaning and whistling. Your husband and son ride around the side of your tipi; the former riding bareback in buckskin leggings, feathers, and war paint, the latter wearing chaps, a flannel shirt, and a cowboy hat. To your left and right, your Cheyenne and Pawnee neighbors are doing the same. You join the other wives in their work; beading, tanning hides, cooking meals; things your mother taught you; things she had in turn learned from her mother. Later in the day, white visitors will walk among the tipis, watching you. In the evening, you will join the other cast members in a crowded arena, performing in Pawnee Bill's Historic Wild West.

Wild West shows endeavored to teach Euro-Americans about life on the western frontier; since Native Americans were vital to this life, they naturally featured prominently in the shows. Native American women in particular held essential roles in the Pawnee Bill Wild West show, although they worked mainly behind-the-scenes performing the same time-honored skills they had for generations. They maintained a traditional home in the encampments and participated in battle reenactments in the show itself. They traveled with their husbands and preserved a traditional view of family life and formed friendships with other ethnic groups while on the road. Most importantly, by

participating in the Wild West shows Native women had the opportunity to preserve their culture. At a time when US federal government policies advocated assimilation via reservations and boarding schools, preserving Native customs was more difficult, and perhaps more important to Native women, than ever.

When investigating the topic of Native American women in Wild West shows, one of the most informative secondary sources is L.G. Moses' *Wild West Shows and the Images of American Indians, 1883-1933*. Although Moses' book covers a wide range of topics, it is incomplete as it rarely even mentions women.[1] The larger literature of today gives the same emphasis; however, the notable exceptions to the rule are those few native female performers who styled themselves as "princesses." Lillian Smith, more popularly known by her stage name, Princess Wenona, was one such woman, and Michael Wallis' *The Real Wild West: The 101 Ranch and the Creation of the American West*, devotes much discussion to her biography. A sharpshooter whose popularity made even the famous Annie Oakley jealous, she was on the Wild West show circuit for many years before retiring.[2] This chapter will discuss her story in more detail later, but it is interesting to a historiographical discussion to note the fame she won merely by presenting herself as an "Indian princess." By calling herself a "princess," Smith separated herself from the other native women in the show, whom the Euro-American audience saw as "squaws;" dirty, subservient women who condoned horrifying acts of violence. The Euro-American audience condemned "squaws" but celebrated those noble women who embraced the dominant culture as "princesses." Smith was one woman who

[1] Moses, *Wild West Shows and the Images of American Indians.*

[2] Wallis, *The Real Wild West,* 309-316.

saw the advantages of being a "princess," so she marketed herself as one. Hence, audiences loved her. Fascinated by her Native heritage, the public nonetheless believed she was far enough removed from it that she was not a threat.

To discover why American Indians, and Native women in particular, traveled with the Wild West shows, we must first discuss what was going on within the tribes themselves at the time. Perhaps the most obvious people to be involved in Pawnee Bill's show were members of the Pawnee tribe. The Pawnees divide themselves into four clans: the Skidi, Chaei, Kitkehahki, and the Pitahauerat.[3] The Pawnees' homeland was in Nebraska, but in 1874, agent William Burgess went south to find new land for them. He settled on a stretch of land immediately west of the Arkansas River and north of the Cimarron, in present-day northeastern Oklahoma. The Pawnees began the long journey, but by February 1875 had only made it as far as Wichita, Kansas, since many storms held them in camp.[4] Along the voyage, young Gordon Lillie met the tribe. A lad of fifteen, he was living in Wellington, Kansas, at the time, and spent all his free time at the Pawnee's camp. He befriended several, most notably a medicine man named Blue Hawk, and eventually followed them to Indian Territory, where he worked at the Indian Agency.[5]

The Pawnees, meanwhile, did not reach their new land until the end of June—much too late to plant crops. Ignoring the bad beginning, the Pawnee women especially were eager to work and make improvements. First, they wished to build homes; earth lodges such as those they had had in Nebraska. The US Congress, however, would not let

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[3] George Hyde, *The Pawnee Indians* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1974), 346.

[4] Ibid., 329, 331.

[5] Shirley, *Pawnee Bill*, 22-23.

them because part of the reason for putting Indians on reservations was to halt such "barbaric" practices. Congress dictated the Pawnees could only build log cabins—however, neither the Pawnees nor their agent knew how, and they had no money for materials, anyway. Thus, Congress did not allow the Pawnees to help themselves, and forced them to survive the winter in unhealthful conditions such as cold canvas tipis with only the little food the government gave them.[6] Congress' reach even extended to the youngest of the Pawnees. The government built a boarding school and thoroughly established a "prison system" by 1883. In 1887, an epidemic of measles broke out, and the agent ordered the faculty not to care for them, but to "kick the children out." Out of eighty-five children affected, at least forty died from lack of care. The government even sent some children away from their families, to Chilocco Indian Agricultural School in far north-central Oklahoma or even as far away as Carlisle School in Pennsylvania.[7] Such horrific treatment continued for several years, causing the population of the Pawnees to decline drastically. In their ancestral home of Nebraska in the year 1872, the Pawnees numbered 2,447. By 1876, only a year after their removal, they had decreased slightly to 2,026, and by 1890, their numbers had fallen dramatically to only 804.[8]

Originally, the Pawnee women enjoyed an elevated status within the tribe. Pawnee religion and lore held the feminine as centrally important. For example, the Pawnees called the constellation known as the Pleiades "The Women." At midnight on the full moon of September, they are directly overhead and only then could the harvest

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[6] Hyde, *The Pawnee Indians*, 331.

[7] Ibid., 343-4.

[8] Ibid., 340, 344.

ceremony festival begin. Further, the Pawnees believed god set these stars there to travel from east to west to form a guide to the Pawnees so they would not get lost. Therefore, women in Pawnee mythology are associated with important things such as crops, food, travel, and direction.[9] Pawnee women were important in daily life, as well, being a matrilineal people.[10] Women made polished black pottery in the winter, for example, and decorated it with incised designs.[11] Some even fought alongside their husbands in battle.[12]

The Cheyenne were another tribe whose members featured prominently in Pawnee Bill's Wild West. The Cheyenne were originally from present-day Minnesota and the Dakotas.[13] While the Pawnees originally lived in earth lodges, the Cheyenne lived in tipis.[14] Prior to reservation life, Cheyenne women enjoyed complementary roles with the men. They farmed, harvested, and cooked the food, and dressed and prepared buffalo robes for trade. They exclusively managed their households, and organized food and gifts for powwows and all major ceremonies.[15] The women also made clothes for all members of their family from buffalo, deer, and elk hides, and they sometimes traded these goods.[16]

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[9] Ibid., 20.

[10] Ibid., 19.

[11] Ibid., 18.

[12] Ibid., 15.

[13] John H. Moore, *The Cheyenne* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 1996), 155-6.

[14] Richard Gaines, *Cheyenne* (Edina, MN: ABCO Publishing Company, 2000), 6.

[15] Moore, *The Cheyenne*, 156.

[16] Gaines, *Cheyenne*, 12, 14.

The Cheyenne had two subcategories: northern and southern. On 28 October 1867, a treaty between the US and the Cheyenne and Arapaho tribes provided for a reservation in present-day Oklahoma for the Southern Cheyenne and Southern Arapaho tribes. In 1869, Congress established a temporary agency at Camp Supply, with Brinton Darlington as agent. A Presidential Executive Order of 10 August 1869 moved the reservation to a site five miles northwest of present-day El Reno, Oklahoma. The name was Darlington, after the agent.[17] Life on the Cheyenne reservation was monotonous, and the people were poor.[18] Because of the meager conditions, several enlisted as US Army scouts or joined the Wild West shows, in order to work for pay to try to make a better life for themselves and their families.

Wild West shows offered Native Americans an opportunity to escape the boredom, impoverishment, and horrors of the reservations. One of the most important was the prospect of working for pay. Pawnee Bill's Wild West paid each man for each member of his household who worked in the show, and any horses he had. The wages were as follows: men, $25; children, $15; women, $10; and horses $25.[19] Presumably, these are monthly wages, "children" probably meant "boys," and the show paid young girls the women's wage. According to this information, the researcher can infer something about the mentality behind the show's organizers. Women were not worth as much as men or even boys. By paying extra for a horse, probably to help alleviate the cost of feed and tack, the show's director encouraged men to bring their own horse if they

[17] Cheyenne and Arapaho Agencies, CAA 58, Introduction, microfilm, Indian Archives, Oklahoma Historical Society, Oklahoma City, OK.

[18] Moore, *The Cheyenne*, 268.

[19] "Wild West Shows and Two Bills Shows, 1 of 2," folder 4, Pawnee Bill Ranch and Museum Archives, Pawnee, OK.

had one, which helped the show immensely, as the public liked to see Indians on horseback running full tilt across the arena. Thus, horses were more important than, or at the very least of equal importance as, women. However, some rare records exist of females without a male escort being in the show, suggesting that while women usually joined the show to accompany their husbands and families, it was not unheard of for a single woman to join of her own accord. Mrs. A. Kelly took her two young boys on the show circuit, for example, as head of household in her own right. From her title, researchers can assume she was a widow, which may be why she got away with emerging as the leader of her family in a world run by men. Miss Martha Rice, however, does not fit the mold. She was probably an unmarried girl who signed up for the show for the same reason others did—in hope for a chance to work for pay at a job that valued her skills.[20]

Another incentive for Native American women to join Pawnee Bill's Wild West show was to be with other natives in a traditional setting. Joining a Wild West show was a common goal for several Indians, as Pawnee Bill had several agents write him letters offering—and sometimes almost begging him to take—Indians for his show. For example, a July 1916 letter from M.H. Bartin, an agent in Gordon, Nebraska, offers a man named Holy Eagle, his wife and nine-year-old boy, and a man named Shoutat, his wife, and two girls aged two and four years.[21] Likely, for an agent to write such a letter to a showman, he was under considerable pressure from Holy Eagle and Shoutat, who wished for gainful employment. Pawnee Bill also put some individuals in charge of procuring cast members. A Pawnee man named Thomas Morgan, for example, had a

[20] "Wild West Shows and Two Bills Shows, 1 of 2," folder 4, Pawnee Bill Ranch and Museum Archives, Pawnee, OK.

[21] Ibid., Folder 22.

contract with Pawnee Bill to provide Pawnee Indians (twenty-five men, ten women, and fifteen children) and thirty horses on 3 August 1921 to go to Sedalia, Missouri. In the contract, Pawnee Bill agreed to feed and transport people and stock at his own expense, and pay all cast members flat rates for the trip. Men earned $20, women $10, children and horses $6.[22] If we compare these numbers to the wages in the late 1880s, we can see inflation has not made much impact. In fact, these numbers are lower, although it may be because Wild West shows were not nearly as profitable as they had been in previous years, and because these individuals were not employed for the same length of time. Another, perhaps more likely reason, is that the supply outweighed the demand. As previously stated, many Natives wished to travel with the shows, and therefore show organizers did not have to pay as much to procure actors.[23]

Cast lists detailed in show programs and route books offer an interesting glimpse into the quavering status of Native American women in Pawnee Bill's Wild West show. The 1894 program lists women under the heading "Squaws," and the program lists their relationship to other cast members (possibly as justification for being included in the show at all). For example, listed is "Female Horse, wife of Good Boy, Chief of the Mohaves." In the 1898 program, the cast list included no native women or children at all, although it enumerated men. The 1899 program, however, listed both native women and children; under the titles of "squaws" and "papooses," of course. 1900's program did not

[22] Pawnee, OK, Pawnee Bill Ranch and Museum archives, document box "Two Bills/Post Two Bills Show, 2 of 2," Folder 7. Note: because of the dates (1916 and 1921), the show in question was not either Pawnee Bill's Historical Wild West (in operation from 1888-1908) nor Buffalo Bill's Wild West and Pawnee Bill's Great Far East, also known as the Two Bills Show (in operation from 1908-1913). After 1913, Pawnee Bill continued to stage smaller traveling shows at state fairs, amusement parks, and the like. These are likely the types of shows that employed Holy Eagle, Shoutat, and Thomas Morgan.

[23] Linda Scarangella McNenly, *Native Performers in Wild West Shows: From Buffalo Bill to Euro Disney* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2012), 54.

list natives at all, although 1901's listed all of them. 1908 once again saw only the men listed. The 1910 program saw an interesting compromise, as it listed all natives under, not their own names, but those of the head of household. For example, there were Kills Enemy under the heading "Indians," Mrs. Kills Enemy under "Squaws," and Kills Enemy again under "Papooses." By tracking the way the programs listed women, we can perhaps glean information about how much show administrators valued them. In 1894, during the show's heyday, women were important enough to be named, but program writers thought the public would also be interested in their husband's status. The emphasis seems to be on family and the cultural leaders, such as "chiefs" and "braves." By 1900, program writers demoted all natives to mere bystanders—that may not have gone over well with the audience, as they completely reversed it by the next year. By 1910, however, only a few years before the demise of Buffalo Bill's Wild West and Pawnee Bill's Great Far East, program writers gave Native women and children only a passing mention, in favor of the Euro-American method of the male being the most important.[24]

The final and most important reason Native Americans wanted to join the Pawnee Bill Wild West show was to give them the opportunity to maintain their traditions. On the show circuit, Native customs were not discouraged, as it was on the reservation or in boarding schools. Indianness was an essential part of show life. Show organizers *needed* Natives to perform tribal songs and dances and to ride with the show in their own style. This allowed American Indians to "hide in plain sight" at a time when federal policies forbade most representations of their culture. In fact, many of the imperialistic acts in the show, such as the attacks on the stagecoach or cabin, could be seen as images of

[24] "Cast Members of WW Shows," vertical files, Pawnee Bill Ranch and Museum Archives, Pawnee, OK.

continued Native resistance against Euro-Americans. Natives also relished humor and irony in their performances. For example, other American Indian performers understood "a subversive monologue when Kicking Bear recited his deeds in Lakota," and appreciated the irony of seeing a Sioux perform Omaha dances.[25]

The Indians' importance manifested itself in many ways, from the daily lives of cast members to special occasions to participation in the show itself. For example, Pawnee Bill purchased typically Euro-American foodstuffs for his cast such as beef, soup, milk, and various vegetables. However, he did supplement it with ethnic foods, such as spaghetti, rice, and corn.[26] The American Indians with the show further supplemented these with their own traditional fare. When two buffalo died of the heat in September 1895, the Indians quickly butchered them.[27] Upon returning from an impromptu fishing trip, they made turtle soup.[28] Since we know that Pawnee and Cheyenne women were instrumental in procuring and cooking food, the women likely handled the bulk of the work. The Native Americans also liked to travel with the show. For example, in his book *Wild West Shows and the Images of American Indians*, Moses relates that while the show was in Paris several Indians ascended the Eiffel Tower. Significantly, Moses mentions no women on the trip.[29] This tells us either women were not allowed to accompany the men about town, or that they were present and ignored in

[25] McNenly, *Native Performers in Wild West Shows,* 82.

[26] Pawnee Bill Ranch and Museum archives, document box "Wild West Shows and Two Bills Shows, 1 of 2," folder 12.

[27] Shaw, *Season 1895,* 42.

[28] Nicodemus and Wilson, *Season 1901*.

[29] Moses, *Wild West Shows and the Images of American Indians,* 82.

the records. Either instance illustrates the male-dominated worldview of the time. Just as the male performers enjoyed sight-seeing, so too would have the women, yet they were left behind. Alternatively, if they were present yet unmentioned, then we can assume the Euro-American males who created the records believed the women did not have thoughts, feelings, or observations mature or important enough to record.

The time-honored special occasions of American Indian life continued on the circuit of the Pawnee Bill Wild West show. Mothers gave birth and doted on their children, much as they always had, and the writers of the route books seized upon the happy occasion, too. In DeSoto, Missouri, on 2 September 1895, for example, Charging Thunder and his wife Taken Prisoner had a baby boy, whom they named Pawnee Bill after the show's director (it is interesting to note they were Mohave, not Pawnee).[30] Not to be outdone, Good Boy and his wife named their little girl, born in Houma, Louisiana, on 13 October 1895 May Lillie, after Pawnee Bill's wife, who was a skilled sharpshooter in the show.[31] Other media were not exempt from the fascination with native children born on the show route. A November 1903 article in the *St. Louis Republic*, for example, details Pony Little Star, born in Portland, Oregon, 18 October 1903, to father Little Chief and mother Shining Light. The paper even went so far as to take a photograph of the family. The flashbulb caused surprise for the adults, but the proud father asked the newspaperman to send a copy of the picture to him at the Rosebud Agency in South Dakota.[32]

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[30] Shaw, *Season 1895*, 82.

[31] Ibid., 99.

[32] "'Fire Water' at the Union Station," *St. Louis Republic*, 2 November 1903, no page.

Contemporary writers did not pay heed to only happy occasions, however. In Pennsylvania on 8 June 1895, a two-year-old Sioux boy named Charles White Horse died of congestion of the lungs. Captain Shaw, who wrote the route book that year, states he "had two doctors out during the day," but to no avail.[33] The necessary time and the expense two separate doctors' visits surely incurred lead the researcher to believe Shaw and his superiors cared much for the young boy and his family. His parents held the boy's funeral the next day, attended by the entirety of the show cast and some 5,000 citizens.[34] Doubtless, the Pennsylvanians came merely to see a traditional Indian burial; but the presence of the show cast entire again speaks to the camaraderie felt among the cast.

American Indian women in the show also engaged in severe bickering, as women everywhere are wont to do at times. In 1895, a woman named Black Buffalo set her tent close to Shaw's and it caused an argument between her and Shaw's wife, Viola.[35] Later in the season, Black Buffalo and another Native woman named Mrs. White Horse got into a "scrap, [and] both came out with cut heads and bad hearts." Apparently, Pawnee Bill saw her argumentativeness as the last straw as he fired Black Buffalo and made her buy a ticket for her home in Rushville, Nebraska.[36]

Fights between the performers were not the norm, however. Cast members formed friendships on the road, where perhaps the inherent temporary lifestyle and loneliness made common ground easier to find. A few Euro-American cast members learned the Sioux language, for example, and when the weather grew cold, the cast fell

[33] Shaw, *Season 1895,* 41.

[34] Ibid., 42.

[35] Ibid., 50.

[36] Ibid., 83.

into the habit of congregating around the Indian's fires to stay warm.[37] While the show was in Racine, Wisconsin, May Lillie went to a large blanket factory and bought $500 worth of blankets she gifted to the American Indians, and they stayed up all night admiring and trading them.[38] When the St. Louis Republic interviewed members of the show in 1903, they learned one of the cast, John Hollow Horn, was a graduate of the Indian boarding school Carlisle. Hollow Horn could speak English quite well, but he did not often do so. Only when the newspapermen mentioned football did he "throw aside his reserve and talk freely."[39] Mutual love of the sport of football provided an avenue of common ground. Show organizers such as Lloyd F. Nicodemus took the Indians to see a play once, which they enjoyed immensely.[40] While the show was in East Saginaw, Michigan on 18 August 1895, all the American cowboys, the entire Mexican band, and every one of the American Indians took streetcars to an amusement park, where they rode the Ocean Wave Swing, making one or two seasick, to the hilarity of the others. In fact, these particular groups whom historically had been the bitterest of enemies often took side-trips together and enjoyed each other's company.[41] Even several years after the show ended, cast members apparently remained in contact. A Cheyenne man, Ernie Black of Longdale, Oklahoma, who was in the Miller Brothers' 101 Ranch Wild West show and

[37] Ibid., 102, 35.

[38] Nicodemus and Wilson, *Season 1901*, 34.

[39] "'Fire Water' at the Union Station," *St. Louis Republic*, 2 November 1903, no page.

[40] Shaw, *Season 1895*, 58.

[41] Ibid., 70, 71, 74, 83, 84, 93.

who once helped get Cheyenne Indians to be in Pawnee Bill's show sent Pawnee Bill a pair of beaded moccasins his wife made in March 1940.[42]

Perhaps because of these friendships, the Native Americans showed immense loyalty to Pawnee Bill's Wild West show. On 2 July 1895, while the show was in Tamaqua, Pennsylvania, for example, there was opposition by another "faker" show—an operation those with Pawnee Bill's show deemed unauthentic. The "faker" show tried to open on the grounds Pawnee Bill was using. The Indians chased them down the street and they fled, terrified.[43] Shortly thereafter, on 4 July 1895, while the show was in Shenandoah, Pennsylvania, the Indians policed the area heavily, and when the show left it was the only show to date that had let no one slip in the show under the sidewalls of the main tent without a ticket.[44] While some would paint such behavior as loyalty to the show (as the author believes is the case here), one could also read it as a form of self-interest, even self-preservation. If the show did poorly, Indian agents might well force them to go back to the reservation.

While often the feelings between cast members were on friendly terms, the feelings of the public towards American Indians could contrast. In a newspaper article from the *St. Louis Republic*, eight police officers at the Union Train Station kept fifty-five Sioux prisoners for two full days while they waited for their train. The Sioux had been with the show for twenty-six weeks, and were returning to the Rosebud and Valentine agencies in South Dakota and Nebraska, respectively. They had just arrived from Pana,

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[42] Ernie Black to Gordon W. "Pawnee Bill" Lillie, 28 March 1940, "Two Bills/Post Two Bills Show, 2 of 2," Folder 24, Pawnee Bill Ranch and Museum Archives, Pawnee, OK.

[43] Shaw, *Season 1895,* 53.

[44] Ibid., 53-4.

Illinois. After the last show of the season, some of the younger men of the party had celebrated with whiskey some coalminers had bought for them. Before they left, they "terrorized" the citizens and became "unmanageable." Therefore, the Pana police telegrammed those in St. Louis to warn them of impending danger. By the time they reached St. Louis, the Indians were sober and no fights occurred. Although the newspaper article did paint the Native Americans as drunks who tried to "escape to the bar" at one point (although possibly, having been held there for two days, they were merely hungry), the article goes on to praise them as "typical Sioux." Their tall heights and almost haughty manner awed the journalist and those Missourians who saw them.[45] Such a dichotomy is interesting. Praise comes immediately after condemnation. One the one hand, Euro-Americans saw these men and women as "noble savages," proud and awe-inspiring, worthy of the highest praise. Their treatment by the police, however, begs the rhetorical question: does being a "typical Sioux" include being a drunk?

To play to the idea of American Indians as "noble savages," Pawnee Bill's Wild West show emphasized the participation of the Native Americans. After all, a portrayal of "real life" on the western plains was what the Euro-American audiences were most interested in seeing. American Indian women, whether the show organizers and audiences realized it at the time or not, played a key role in that story. Advertisements for the show included posters portraying images of a day at an Indian village and a village on the move, for example.[46] One of the newspaper advertisements for the show called it

[45] "'Fire Water' at the Union Station," *St. Louis Republic*, 2 November 1903.

[46] Farnum, *Pawnee Bill's Historic Wild West,* 10-11.

"Pawnee Bill's Indian Show"—there was no mention of "Historical Wild West." [47] Another newspaper devoted almost an entire article to the Indians in the show, dwelling on "a tribe of Pawnee Indians …[who spoke] the Pawnee language." This article called the show "Pawnee Bill's Wild West Show and Indian Village and Museum."[48] We can see by the emphasis placed on the American Indians even in the naming of the show itself that Native Americans were of the upmost importance to the show in its early years. Pawnee Bill knew the public wanted to see Indian villages and hear their language. In fact, on 19 May 1895 in New Castle, Pennsylvania, people crowded the Indians so closely one man "got out of patience, took his horse and ran them out." When the show landed at Antwerp, Belgium, on 19 April 1894, a vast crowd awaited them at the docks, mainly to see the Indians.[49]

The Native American women's most significant contribution to the show was, therefore, in the encampment they set up near the show tent in each city the show visited. They erected tipis and maintained a traditional household, just as tribal women had for generations.[50] Native women further took the opportunity to become entrepreneurs themselves. American Indian women would immediately sell the beadwork or jewelry, for example, they made during the day.[51] The opportunity to perform their time-honored roles served to preserve the "Indianness" of the cast, and proved interesting and educational to the Euro-American visitors.

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[47] "Pawnee Bill's Indian Show," *Shenandoah Herald*, 19 September 1890.

[48] "The Peabody Fair," *Wichita Eagle*, 23 August 1887.

[49] Shaw, *Season 1895,* 34.

[50] Ibid., 91.

[51] McNenly, *Native Performers in Wild West Shows,* 124-5.

Native American women also participated in the show itself. They took part in the Grand Review, wherein the entire cast was in the arena at the same time as a preview for what the audience was about to see, and in the Final Salute, wherein the entire cast again packed the arena as a friendly goodbye to the audience. The American Indian women also participated in some of the acts within the show itself, albeit in a limited, stereotypical way. The women's most notable act in 1910, for example, was the portrayal of the Battle of Summit Springs. Historically, in this battle, the Fifth United States Calvary, commanded by General E.A. Carr, and Pawnee Scouts under the command of Buffalo Bill Cody, fought renegade Sioux, Cheyenne, and Arapahos, under their leader Tall Bull. Tall Bull and his followers had raided a Euro-American settlement, murdering several people and taking some women captive. The US Army and Pawnee Scouts followed their trail to the Indians' camp. Here is where the show picks up. The audience saw a war dance and the "cruel treatment of the women captives" by the Native American women. In a surprise dawn attack, the Army and scouts raid the village, kill the warriors, rescue their women, capture the Indian women and children, and Buffalo Bill shoots and kills Tall Bull.[52]

And those who deserve it live happily ever after, according to the Euro-American view.

[52] *1910 Program*, no page numbers.

Encampment, exact year unknown.

Candid image showing the Native American encampment downhill from the horse tent.[53]

Native Cast, exact year unknown.

Members of Pawnee Bill's Wild West Show, in Native dress.[54]

[53] Farnum, *Pawnee Bill's Historic Wild West,* 51.

[54] Photo courtesy Pawnee Nation, Pawnee, OK, www.pawneenation.org (accessed October 2012).

Some Indian women, however, did enjoy a larger part in the show. Most notable of these is Lillian Smith, more popularly known by her stage name Princess Wenona. Because she styled herself as an "Indian Princess," a wealth of knowledge exists about her, unlike the majority of native women in the shows, whom Euro-American audiences gave the derogatory name "squaws." Smith was born 3 February 1871 in Coleville, California. The 1880 census displays an "I" for Indian, not a "W" for white, although her particular tribe is unknown.[55] Wild West show organizers billed her as a Sioux princess, the daughter of chief Crazy Snake. According to publicity accounts from the mid-1880s, she was seven years old when she received her first .22 rifle. She most likely signed up with Buffalo Bill's Wild West when he discovered her in 1885 while at a shooting gallery in Los Angeles. Maybe because of this encounter, or her home state, or a combination of the two, she took the stage name the "California Girl." She proved herself skilled with shotguns, revolvers, and rifles, especially while horseback. For example, she could break ten glass balls on strings swinging from a pole, and then shoot the strings without a miss. Annie Oakley, the famous, petite, Euro-American sharpshooter with Buffalo Bill, grew jealous of the attention the press gave Smith, especially when the show toured England in 1887 as part of Queen Victoria's Jubilee, celebrating the first fifty years of her reign. At a command performance for the queen, both "American girls," as Queen Victoria called them, were presented to her; but when the *Illustrated London News* published a sketch of the event, they portrayed Smith and ignored the presence of Oakley. Indeed, when fifteen-year-old Smith first joined the show, Oakley began to lie about her age, saying she had been born in 1866, instead of 1860. She became a young girl of twenty again,

[55]Wallis, *The Real Wild West*, 309.

overnight. Oakley had always been petite (which may explain how she got away with the age-defying game), and Smith had a tendency to gain weight. When she noticed this, Oakley began to ridicule her "ample figure" often.[56] Oakley's derision finally got so bad it led Smith to leave Buffalo Bill's show in 1889 and tour with other shows under the new stage name "Princess Wenona" so the press and the public would not recognize her as easily.[57] She had four husbands, and was involved with several more men, but her favorite husband was her last, Frank C. Smith, an expert rifle and pistol shot, with whom she continued to tour until their divorce.[58] During the 1905 season, the couple joined Pawnee Bill's Historic Wild West with an act called "Wenona and Frank—the World's Champion Rifle Shots," wherein Smith shot ashes off Frank's cigar and a dime out of his hand.[59] In 1907, she enlisted with the 101 Ranch Wild West show and permanently moved to Oklahoma. By the mid-1920s, several 101 Ranch performers had moved into the film industry, but Hollywood left others behind. The Miller brothers let many of these, including Smith, live on the property in exchange for light ranch work.[60] Smith stayed there, penniless and almost friendless, until her death in 1930.[61]

[56] Ibid., 310.

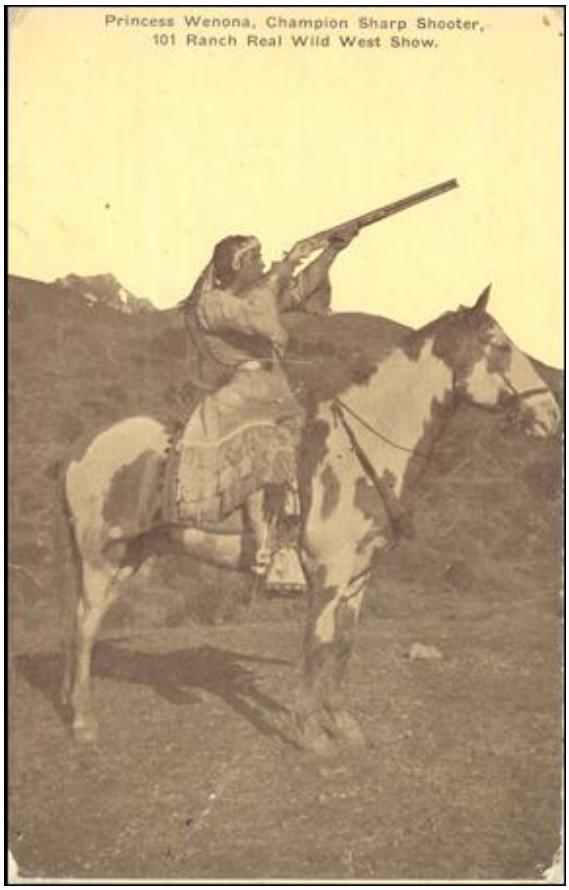
[57] Ibid., 312.

[58] Ibid., 312-313.

[59] Ibid., 313.

[60] Ibid., 314.

[61] Ibid., 315.



Lillian Smith

Postcard image of Lillian Smith, popularly known as Princess Wenona, in costume.[62]

[62] Photo courtesy Cherokee Strip Museum, "Noble County - 101 Ranch - Kraus, Postcard Publisher," http://www.cherokee-strip-museum.org/NobleCounty/101_Ranch_Kraus.htm (accessed 18 February 2013).

Pawnee Bill's Historic Wild West endeavored to teach Euro-Americans about life on the western frontier. Native Americans both male and female were essential to this life, and so naturally featured prominently in the shows. Indian women traveled with their husbands, preserved a time-honored view of family life, and maintained a traditional home. Native women had done these things for generations, but now they were doing them for different reasons. Because Congress put many tribes on reservations and took many children to boarding schools, the Wild West shows provided an opportunity for work, for pay, to escape the reservation, to travel, and to keep their families together. Most importantly, employment in the show gave American Indians the opportunity to hide their culture in plain sight and thereby preserve it. With the show, Natives had the opportunity to ride, dance, speak their own language, and perform tasks, like beadwork, just as they had for generations, but the US federal government tried to take from them. Similar to how the public's captivation with early cowgirls allowed them to push the boundaries of society, the Native women in the Wild West shows were—ironically, because of the Euro-American public's fascination with all things Indian—able to circumvent federal policies so effectively.

“For Pure Fun in Emulation and Rivalry”: Georgian Riders in Pawnee Bill’s Wild West

> “I never learned riding, never been taught it as most performers are. All the fancy riding I do I did as a child for pure fun in emulation and rivalry.”
>
> – Frida Mgaloblishvili, Georgian Wild West rider, 1894

Imagine. You wake in the early morning, eat a meager breakfast, and say farewell to your family before pulling on your heavy wool coat and fastening the toggles, knowing it will be cold outside. You gather your small bundle of things, take a deep breath, and open the front door. You stand there before your door and turn several times to the right, an old custom calling for favorable omens before starting a journey—you need all the help you can get on this excursion.[1] You walk away from your home, ignoring the view of the mountains and the smell of the cows in your small pasture because you know if you look, if you think about it, you'll lose your nerve and want to stay. You join others on the dirt track, beaten smooth by generations of your family and theirs, and notice they are all men; you are the only woman in sight. Nonetheless, you are all on your way…

… to board an enormous iron ship that eventually will pull into New York Harbor, miles away from your Georgian homeland, where no one speaks your language. You will receive a horse, train it, and begin performing in Pawnee Bill's Historic Wild West.

Beginning in 1900, Pawnee Bill began to include ethnic groups from "the east" (areas such as the Caucasus, Japan, or northern Africa), mainly to demonstrate their horseback riding abilities and compare them to those of western American cowboys and Indians. One such group was the Georgians, misrepresented as Russian Cossacks. The Georgians' riding earned them many fans and therefore they were important to the economic success of the show. For the Georgians, employment in an American Wild West show was an opportunity to earn more money than they could at home and send it back to their families living in oppression on their farms. In 1906, Christine Tsintsadze

[1] Georgian, *Cossacks, Indians, and Buffalo Bill,* 15-6.

became the first Georgian female rider in Pawnee Bill's Wild West, and her involvement is made even more fascinating because of the scant information the record holds of her.

The contributions of Georgians to Pawnee Bill's Historic Wild West have largely been relegated to the margins. The most comprehensive secondary source on the topic is Richard Alexis Georgian's 2011 book *Cossacks, Indians, and Buffalo Bill: The Adventures of Georgian Riders in America*.[2] Another helpful work is Irakli Makharadze's 2001 book *Wild West Georgians,* which, unlike Georgian's text, includes a discussion about the female riders in the show.[3] In her seminal article "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis," Joan W. Scott not only argued historians cannot ignore women's contributions, but that we cannot keep them separate from men's. Women do not exist in isolation; therefore, historians cannot understand them in isolation.[4]

Such a paradigm is essential to understanding the contributions of both male and female Georgian riders in Wild West shows. They all came from the same tense political nation, for similar reasons, and endured similar triumphs and hardships while performing. In order to appreciate their contributions, we must first learn something about their background and their relation to one another.

Georgia is a small country in central Asia, bounded by the snowy Caucasus Mountains and Russia to the north, the plains of Azerbaijan to the east, and by Turkey to

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[2] Ibid.

[3] Makaradze and Chkhaidze, *Wild West Georgians.*

[4] Joan W. Scott, "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis," *The American Historical Review* 91, no. 5 (1986): 1054.

the south.[5] Georgians view their country as the land of hospitality, poetry, and wine, where everyone is helpful.[6] Unlike its neighboring nations, where the concept of national identity is a recent occurrence, Georgia's national consciousness has been forming for over 2,000 years.[7] This phenomenon is widely because of what one author has called the "strange convergence of nationalism with religion."[8] Georgia is a thoroughly Christian country, having adopted the religion in the fourth century; indeed, Georgians trace their lineage to the Apostle Andrew.[9] They make certain to differentiate between their own Christianity and the Islamic religion of neighboring nations.[10]

[5] Jonathan McCollum, "Songs from the Steppes: Kazakh Music Today, Songs of Defiance: Music of Chechnya and the North Caucasus, and Songs of Survival: Traditional Music of Georgia," *Journal of American Folklore* 124, no. 494 (Fall 2011): 322, 325.

[6] Rebecca Gould, "Becoming a Georgian Woman," *Frontiers: A Journal of Women's Studies* 31, no. 2 (2010): 129.

[7] McCollum, "Songs from the Steppes," 325.

[8] Gould, "Becoming a Georgian Woman," 142-3.

[9] McCollum, "Songs from the Steppes," 325.

[10] Gould, "Becoming a Georgian Woman," 130.

Map 3: The Caucasus and Central Asia.[11]

Note the country of Georgia at the left in dark green, bounded by the Black Sea, Turkey, and Russia.

Map 4: Georgia.[12]

Note the seaport of Batumi, from whence the Georgian riders set sail on their way to England and America.

[11] Perry-Castaneda library map Collection. "Asia Maps: Caucasus and Central Asia (political), 2009. http;//www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/asia.html (accessed 12 October 2012).

[12] Flags and Anthems.com. "Country Information Georgia," http://flags-and-anthems.com/country-information-georgia.html (accessed 12 October 2012).

Georgians have a long history of excellent horsemanship. Wedged as they were between the empires of Rome, Byzantium, Persia, and Russia, Georgians have depended upon their cavalry for survival. Therefore, from ancient times horse breeders have enjoyed respect and a highly lucrative business supplying cavalry horses to the king.[13] Past generations have passed down this exceptional horse sense via more than 365 different horseracing games that have become an essential part of Georgian life.[14] When members of neighboring nations think of Georgia, they think of horses. In particular, the principality of Guria, the southwest area of Georgia situated on the mountainous Black Sea coast, became famous for expert riders. In fact, Tedo Sakhokia, a writer and ethnographer, wrote of them, "The Gurians are special among Georgians with their beauty and alertness." Indeed, the Gurians took these skills to a new audience.[15]

The story of the Georgians' recruitment for the Wild West is an odd one. Thomas Oliver was born in Manchester to a family of circus performers who traveled extensively in Georgia. Oliver had already been to Tbilisi, the Georgian capital, and spoke the language well. When presented with the problem of how to hire "Cossack" riders for his show, William Frederick "Buffalo Bill" Cody hired Oliver as commissioner. Oliver stopped in the eastern port city of Batumi on the Black Sea, at the home of the British Council James Chambers. Chambers' employee, Kirile Jorbenadze, was familiar with many riders and offered his help. He took Oliver to the village of Bakhvi and visited Ivane Makharadze, who got the other riders.[16]

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[13] Makharadze and Chkhaidze, *Wild West Georgians,* 17.

[14] Georgian, *Cossacks, Indians, and Buffalo Bill*, 17.

[15] Makharadze and Chkhaidze, *Wild West Georgians,* 5.

[16] Ibid., 9; Georgian, *Cossacks, Indians, and Buffalo Bill,* 42.

Like Oliver, the story of how Ivane got his start in show business is yet another interesting saga. He spent his childhood in Bakhvi. In 1880, when he was fourteen, his father asked him to ride to a distant village on an errand. Ivane rode so hard he killed the horse. He left home ashamed, went to the port city of Batumi, joined a ship's crew, and traveled to New York City. Upon arrival, he quit his boring, exhausting job, and gained employment at a bakery and then as a cleaner for a New York circus. There, an Arabian rider noticed his affinity for horses and gave him a better job taking care of the animals. Ivane eventually saved enough to buy a horse, and ended up doing stunts in the circus, gaining much publicity. He returned home in 1885; only one year before Oliver needed Georgian riders. Therefore, Oliver likely already knew about Ivane.[17]

The Georgian riders Ivane rounded up were mainly peasant farmers and family men.[18] They all left home for one reason, however: to earn money. Riding with a show would earn them much more than they could at home.[19] Georgians encountered difficulties when applying for visas to America because of social turbulence and economic collapse, and to get a visa, officials required bribery.[20] Once the travelers did obtain the proper papers, they endured a grueling month-and-a-half long journey to reach America.[21]

Buffalo Bill referred to the riders as "Russian Cossacks" for many reasons. First, it was simpler, and technically they were Russian; after all, Georgia had been part of the

[17] Georgian, *Cossacks, Indians, and Buffalo Bill*, 10.

[18] Ibid, 17.

[19] Ibid, 15-16.

[20] Ibid., 148.

[21] Ibid., 174.

Russian Empire since 1801.[22] However, the Georgians did *not* think it the truth. Georgian kings and queens had ruled the kingdom for centuries before Czar Alexander I took it over. His successors' colonial policies from 1801-1917 gradually suppressed Georgian culture and language and supplanted them with those of Russia; a process called "Russification."[23] The main vehicle for the czar's oppression was the Cossacks, an ethnic group of Turkic tribal groups of the Eurasian steppes.[24]

Around 1900, Georgia became militant opponents to the czar's Russification program, and by 1905, it had erupted into open revolution. In Guria, the revolutionary movement was particularly strong. Meager land allotments and high rents and taxes to nobles, gentry, and the clergy led to harsh feelings and the common saying, "If I tie up a cow on my bit of land, her tail will be in someone elses'!"[25] The Gurian movement, therefore, demanded rent reduction, refused to pay government taxes or tithes to priests, and protested usurpation of peasant land by the state.[26] The Cossacks forcibly conscripted lodging, food, and luggage bearers from the peasantry.[27] They would routinely flog women and children, violate women, trample innocent people under their running horses, and torture peasants. One Georgian referred to them as the "archenemy of all that is human" and the "cruel tool of czarism."[28]

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[22] Makharadze and Chkhaidze, *Wild West Georgians,* 6.

[23] Georgian, *Cossacks, Indians, and Buffalo Bill,* 15.

[24] Makharadze and Chkhaidze, *Wild West Georgians,* 6.

[25] As quoted in Georgian, *Cossacks, Indians, and Buffalo Bill,* 131.

[26] Ibid., 163.

[27] Ibid., 131.

[28] As quoted in Georgian, *Cossacks, Indians, and Buffalo Bill,* 16-17.

The situation was so poor in rural Georgia that as many as 80% of the male farming peasantry left to look for seasonal or permanent jobs in the towns, leaving their families behind to take on even more of the farming responsibilities.[29] The Georgians' urban-ward movement did not halt their rebellious ideas, however; nor did they escape the Cossacks in this way. The seaport of Batumi became a magnet for starving breadwinners; many labored on a new oil pipeline from Michaeloff in Odessa.[30] The workers lived in squalor, earned meager wages, and worked fourteen-hour days. When the company fired 400 workers, over 6,000 people demonstrated on March 9, 1902. The Cossacks attacked, leaving fifteen dead, fifty-four wounded, and hundreds arrested.[31]

The Georgians hated the Cossacks, thinking them worse than savages.[32] Therefore, when ten Georgian riders went to England with Buffalo Bill on a quest to find work to earn money for their families only to find themselves billed as "Cossacks," they were dismayed and frustrated. Worse, the language barrier prevented them from correcting anyone. Maybe only one individual in each group representing various nations associated with Buffalo Bill's Wild West spoke English and acted as interpreter for the rest; perhaps that one person was not even fluent.[33] Only one Georgian rider, Luka Chkartishvili, spoke English on the first trip. Apparently, he and his countrymen deeply felt the need to learn English to help them in their daily lives while in England and America. Especially important to them was the ability to educate their audience—like

[29] Ibid, 131.

[30] Ibid., 133.

[31] Ibid., 163.

[32] Ibid., 16-17.

[33] Ibid., 295.

Luther Standing Bear, perhaps they, too, wished to advocate for their own people while abroad. They were *not* Russian Cossacks; they were Georgians, and indeed felt cultural oppression from the true Cossacks. Luka reported to a Georgian newspaper, the *Georgian Correspondent*:

> We are well aware that lack of education is a great obstacle to us. In the future during our next visit to this country, we'll certainly study English as our friend did; in the evening free English lessons are given in several places. We are regarded as Cossacks; it's a shame for us that we can't even manage to explain to them that we are from Georgia.[34]

Being the only one to speak a little English, Buffalo Bill saw Luka as the leader of the riders. As a youth, Luka was a goldsmith apprentice to his father. He often made deliveries because he loved to ride, and many recognized him as the best rider in his hometown of Lanchkuti.[35] Buffalo Bill's publicists billed him as a "prince" of "noble blood," and said he won several medals for service to the czar as part of the Russian Royal Guard. In reality, he was a peasant and had never been in the military.[36] Indeed, most group leaders with Wild West shows, including Pawnee Bill's Historic Wild West, were referred to as "princes" as publicity to attract larger audiences.[37]

Thomas Oliver, the recruiter of the Georgians, was largely responsible for the false identification of the Georgians as Cossacks. The *Hutchinson Leader* reported on 24 July 1908:

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[34] As quoted in Georgian, *Cossacks, Indians, and Buffalo Bill,* 180.

[35] Ibid., 28.

[36] Georgian, 32; *Omaha Daily Bee*, "Pawnee Bill Tomorrow," 1907.

[37] Makharadze and Chkhaidze, *Wild West Georgians,* 8.

> The Cossacks were the real thing, right from the Czar's army. Splendid horsemen and brave fighters, they are also fierce and cruel. They were members of the same regiment that charged upon a throng of men, women and children in the streets of St. Petersburg two years ago and shot and sabered, murdered a thousand.[38]

Most likely, this false, deadly reputation was yet another ploy to gain attention and publicity. Audiences loved it; within the relative security of the arena seats, they could gaze upon the exploits of a bloodthirsty brute, famous in his home country for his fearsomeness. People, after all, enjoy being safely frightened.

Ten men traveled in the first troupe of Georgians, aged eighteen through twenty-five.[39] Upon their arrival in England, Londoners were extremely excited to encounter so-called "Cossacks" for the first time. With their daggers, swords, and eye-catching national outfit, they were often topics of conversation.[40] This, of course, was what Wild West organizers wanted to happen. On 28 May 1892, Nate Salsbury, the Buffalo Bill's Wild West show manager, confirmed to the British newspaper *The Oracle:* "Yes, they arrived last night. They come from beyond Tiflis [Tblisi], near the extreme of the Caucasus Mountains."[41] Perhaps the highlight of the show season was a command performance before Queen Victoria at Windsor on 25 June, when the queen was "charmed" by their performance.[42]

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[38]As quoted in Makharadze and Chkhaidze, *Wild West Georgians,* 12-13.

[39] Ibid., 7.

[40] Ibid., 11.

[41] Ibid., 7.

[42] Ibid., 12.

On 29 March 1893, a cast of twelve Georgian riders arrived in America for the first time with Buffalo Bill's Wild West.[43] Buffalo Bill's monopoly on "Cossacks" ended in 1900, however, when a cast of five joined Pawnee Bill's Historic Wild West. They were "Chief of the Cossacks" Alexis Gogokhia, Giorgi Chkhaidze, Nestor Khukhunaishvili, Teophane Kavtaradze, and Irakli Tsintsadze, and all were veterans of Buffalo Bill's Wild West.[44] The following year's cast list as enumerated in the 1901 route book confirms all returned for the 1901 season. They also show Alexis Gogokhia changed his last name to "Georgian."[45] Presumably, he realized Euro-American show announcers and fans found it much easier to pronounce, but another possibility is he was attempting to educate his audience as to his correct nationality. The spelling of Georgian surnames in the 1900 and 1901 route books do not match exactly; for example, Irakli's surname is given as "Cindsadse" and "Cuicadse," respectively; again, presumably because of the tendency of Euro-American record-keepers to mishear (or simply not care about) the correct spelling of surnames.

In 1902, Pawnee Bill's Georgian cast was completely different; it included "Prince" Luka Chkartishvili of Buffalo Bill fame, his bothers Mikheil and Kostanstine (often called Kosta for short), Miron Chkonia, and Ioseb and Aaron Shardashvili, who are also presumably brothers.[46] Luka, Kosta, and Mikheil stayed with Pawnee Bill until at least 1907, the last tour before Pawnee Bill's merger with Buffalo Bill.[47] Indeed, during

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[43] Ibid., 8.

[44] Georgian, *Cossacks, Indians, and Buffalo Bill,* 141; Wilson and Nicodemus, *Season 1900*, 31.

[45] Nicodemus and Wilson, *Season 1901*.

[46] Georgian, *Cossacks, Indians, and Buffalo Bill,* 173.

[47] Ibid., 251, 273, 276.

the 1905 season, they were three of only four Georgians to ride with the show.[48] A 1907 manifest of the *SS St. Louis* provides some background information about two of the brothers. Kosta was thirty-eight years of age and could read and write, while Mikheil was thirty-two years and illiterate. Both men were married, probably the reason they always returned home for the off-season from November to April while Luka never did. This manifest mentions another man, Toma Chkartishvili, most likely another brother. He was only twenty-five years of age (making him the youngest of the Georgian troupe that year), single, and literate, and the record states he was on his first trip to America.[49] This shows the tendency of families to stick together; brothers could get each other a job with the show and take care of one another while traveling.

While traveling with Pawnee Bill's Historic Wild West, the riders lived in Car 115, from whence they would "come yawning out of their sleepers" in the mornings before "vault[ing] into their saddles and canter[ing] away to the showgrounds," according to a July 1900 article by *The Jackson Daily Citizen*.[50] Once at the showground, their work began. The Georgians always opened their act with traditional songs and dances.[51] They played no traditional instruments, as in Georgian music the voice is the main vehicle of expression.[52] Georgians have many types of songs: those for work, celebrations, lamentations, sacred occasions, a commemoration of nationalism, or simply everyday

[48] Ibid., 251.

[49] Ibid., 276.

[50] Ibid., 143, 146.

[51] Makharadze and Chkhaidze, *Wild West Georgians*, 12, 38.

[52] McCollum, "Songs from the Steppes," 325.

life.[53] The dancing of the men was energetic; they would leap and kick, then fall to the ground to swivel on their knees with ease. Sometimes they would rise up on the toes of their boots, looking proud and stately.[54]

However impressive their native dancing was, the Georgian riding was the most important and awe-inspiring. Horseback riding was what Georgians were famous for, why Pawnee Bill hired them, and what endeared them to Americans. As all the cast did, the Georgians rode in the first and last acts of the Wild West, the Grand Entry and the Final Salute. They took part in one of the "Hippodrome Races;" a series of races with some type of complication (for example, a chariot race or a Roman race, wherein the riders stood on two horses simultaneously). Show organizers called this one the Race of Nations, in which members of different nationalities rode against each other; a cowboy, an American Indian, a Mexican, and a "Cossack."[55]

This race was exciting, to be sure, but nothing compared to the Georgians' own act. The act was described variously—yet always with an air of glamour—in route books as "Alex Georgian's Troupe of Russian Cossacks, the Most Dexterous and Daring Riders Ever Seen (By Permission Czar of Russia)" and " Wild Riding Cossacks from the Caucasus of Russia will present their reckless feats of horsemanship."[56] The entire show consisted of twenty-nine acts, but show organizers always placed the Georgians as the

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[53] Ibid., 325.

[54] Jack Anderson, "On Pointe in Black Boots from the Black Sea," *New York Times*, 24 February 1998. Although a modern source not contemporary with Pawnee Bill's Historic Wild West, the newspaper review is of only the most traditional dance, and is therefore appropriate here.

[55] *Buffalo Bill's Wild West combined with Pawnee Bill's Great Far East*; Georgian, 207; Nicodemus and Wilson, *Season 1901*; Wilson and Nicodemus, *Season 1900,* 35.

[56] *Buffalo Bill's Wild West combined with Pawnee Bill's Great Far East*; Wilson and Nicodemus, *Season 1900,* 35.

last act of the program, as their feats of horsemanship were so good no other riding act wanted to follow them.[57]

Georgian women, too, eventually became involved in the act, despite cultural obstacles. Georgian men hold a patriarchal, and yet paradoxical, view of their women. Georgians like to say they are a Christian nation, partly in an attempt to align their country with Europe and therefore distance it from the Islamic Middle East.[58] Indeed, Georgian men looked down on Muslim women who wore veils because they believed these women did not realize they were free.[59] Yet, like the Middle East, Georgia had an extremely patriarchal society where women did not enjoy much freedom.[60] According to the Georgian view, women should submit to the fate doled out by the man in their lives, whether her father, husband, or son.[61] A woman's true place was in the home; for example, during a *supra*, a traditional feast for celebrations such as weddings or funerals, women were expected to serve the food and listen to the men; but never to speak themselves.[62]

The paradox continues when researchers consider Georgian men differentiated greatly between "good" women and prostitutes, who are quite prevalent in Georgian society. Good women are virgins until marriage. Wives are respected and honored, are worshiped for their purity, and are the mothers of Georgian children. Prostitutes,

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[57] Makharadze and Chkhaidze, *Wild West Georgians,* 38-9.

[58] Gould, "Becoming a Georgian Woman," 127-8.

[59] Ibid., 132.

[60] Ibid., 127-8.

[61] Ibid., 140.

[62] Gould, "Becoming a Georgian Woman," 132; McCollum, "Songs from the Steppes," 325.

however, exist for men to use them brutally. Any married man who does not cheat on his wife with prostitutes is a coward viewed with scorn by all, even his wife. One author reported a Georgian man stated that the best sex was "[w]hen the woman is dry… when she's not aroused. That way the man has more control." When the female author stated she would classify such an encounter as rape, the man agreed.[63]

In 1892, the first season Georgian riders were in America, "Prince" Ivane Makharadze told an American newspaper, "…our women would not come. Not for anything. They have remained behind to look after the grapes, the maize, the horses, the old people, and the children while we are away."[64] We can see from this single quotation that Georgian men depended on their wives to be submissive. While the men left to work and enjoy the grand adventure of travelling to America—for however difficult their lives sometimes were, the journey was an unusual, exhilarating experience—they expected their wives to stay behind and labor not only at their own traditional tasks, but to step up and take on the men's farm tasks, as well.

In direct contrast to this obvious reluctance to include female riders in the show, the next year, 1893, Frida Mgaloblishvili became the first female rider to perform with Buffalo Bill.[65] Significantly, however, publicists incorrectly billed her as the wife of one of the other riders. One cannot help but wonder if the Georgian men, or perhaps the Euro-American Victorian men, (or perhaps *both*) wanted to hide the existence of such a thing as an independent and competent single woman who did not fear traveling abroad

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[63] Gould, "Becoming a Georgian Woman," 133.

[64] As quoted in Georgian, *Cossacks, Indians, and Buffalo Bill,* 34.

[65] Makharadze and Chkhaidze, *Wild West Georgians,* 8.

unaccompanied. Alternatively, perhaps the American newspapers merely assumed a relationship based on the two show people having the same surname.

For her part, Frida Mgaloblishvili was born August 1871 and arrived in America in 1893. She performed with Buffalo Bill only during the 1893 season, before moving to the Barnum and Bailey circus, where she stayed for two years.[66] In 1894, she gave an interview wherein she related that as a young girl her parents sent her to Paris, where she learned French, German, Italian, and English. She said she had "never learned riding, never been taught it as most performers are. All the fancy riding I do I did as a child for pure fun in emulation and rivalry…" Largely because of Frida's extensive education (i.e. the fact she could speak English) and her demure attitude outside the ring, the American press praised Gurian women and bragged about their abilities, saying they could ride and hunt so well many found it "not hard to believe that they are real Amazons."[67]

Like the four Chkartishvili brothers, women tended to travel to American Wild West shows together, as well. Maro and Barbale Zahareishvili were sisters raised in Luka Chkartishvili's hometown of Lanchkuti. Barbale, the younger, was only sixteen years of age when she came to America in 1912 with her sister and brother-in-law, Veliko Kvitaishvili, who had been three years before. She originally came to America to help her sister care for her two young children, but soon Barbale found herself caught up in show business, too. Maro, the elder sister, could ride three horses simultaneously while

[66] Ibid., 37.

[67] Ibid., 35.

standing up. Disbelieving crowds often asked her to show them the soles of her shoes to ensure there was no glue.[68]

[68] Ibid., 38-9.

The Zahareishvili Sisters. Maro and Barbale in the front row. Note their attire and weaponry is identical to the men's.[69]

Christine Tsintsadze.

Christine Tsintsadze with her saber, circa 1910. A tough and beautiful woman, she was the only Georgian woman on record to have performed with Pawnee Bill.[70]

[69] Farnum, *Pawnee Bill's Historic Wild West.*

[70] Makharadze and Chkhaidze, *Wild West Georgians,* 38.

Unlike Buffalo Bill, Pawnee Bill waited many years before employing a Georgian woman; and then only at the insistence of "Prince" Luka, who, by this time, had the trust of Pawnee Bill. By 1906, the Georgians' fourteen-year-old act was getting old and was no longer quite so exciting to audiences. Luka, therefore, introduced women riders hoping to increase interest.[71] The only Georgian woman on record to have performed with Pawnee Bill was Christine Tsintsadze, who was also reared in Luka Chkartishvili's hometown of Lanchkuti. She came to America in 1908, the year the show did not go on tour but performed for an extended stay at the Wonderland Amusement Park in the Massachusetts Bay area. She was extremely tough; she had three near-death experiences in only one season, but "stubbornly went on performing." She was also quite beautiful, and her good looks and engaging performances won her many fans who repeatedly attempted to kiss her after shows—or even to abduct her. Fortunately, her chivalrous Georgian companions always prevented this.[72] In an interesting discrepancy, a 2012 online Georgian news article states she herself fought off her would-be kidnappers, despite the rest of the offered information being almost verbatim from *Wild West Georgians*.[73] Why the single difference? One could most likely correctly argue the journalist wished to portray Georgian women in a better (i.e. stronger, more modern) light.

The next year, Pawnee Bill merged with Buffalo Bill in the "Buffalo Bill's Wild West and Pawnee Bill's Great Far East," popularly called The Two Bills Show. The idea

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[71] Georgian, *Cossacks, Indians, and Buffalo Bill*, 256.

[72] Makharadze and Chkhaidze, *Wild West Georgians*, 37-8.

[73] Tamar Chergoleishvili, "Twenty Years of U.S.-Georgia Partnership," http://en.tabula.ge/article-6504.html (accessed 29 October 2012).

behind the new format was to represent and contrast the cultures and styles of the two hemispheres. For example, audiences could compare the "Russian Cossacks, the proudest representatives of the Czar's cavalry," with the expert horsemanship of "Uncle Sam's soldiery."[74] The two bosses kept only the best performers from each show, and Christine earned the right to stay on; indeed, she continued performing for the Two Bills Show until returning to Georgia in 1912.[75]

Significantly, only one female Georgian rider exists on record in Pawnee Bill's Historic Wild West. Why was Pawnee Bill so hesitant to include female Gurian riders? Female riders were, of course, more rare than their male counterparts; Buffalo Bill had always included more Georgians in his show than Pawnee Bill did in his, so likely Buffalo Bill was on the cutting edge and hence was the first to employ female riders. Buffalo Bill's first female Georgian rider began performing in 1893, however, while Pawnee Bill waited until 1906; a full thirteen years later. This large time gap cannot account for the riders' rarity; thirteen years should have been plenty of time to jump at the chance to include female riders, leading us to speculate perhaps Pawnee Bill had a real reason for not including them… at least in the records.

One cannot help but compare the dearth of information regarding female Gurian riders to that of Native American women. Official records hardly ever mentioned American Indian women, either; when they did, it was only in direct relation to their husbands. In reality, however, these women had always been with the show and had

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[74] *Buffalo Bill's Wild West combined with Pawnee Bill's Great Far East*, 1910.

[75] Makharadze and Chkhaidze, *Wild West Georgians*, 37-8; Georgian, *Cossacks, Indians, and Buffalo Bill*, 290-1. Christine had fortunate timing, as the show went bankrupt in Denver, Colorado the next year, 1913, leaving many performers without enough earnings to get home.

important roles. They erected an "Indian Village" on the showgrounds and the Euro-American visitors could walk among the tipis to watch the women at their work. The show organizers exhibited the racism and sexism of their time and did not grant equal billing to Native American men, much less Native American women. Native tribal life fascinated their audience, however, so the show organizers used this captivation to their advantage, publicizing Natives enough to sell many tickets. Other ethnic groups such as the Georgians, however, did not have this level of public fascination, and so posters did not feature them nearly as often; their women even less so. Perhaps, like the American Indian women, Georgian women had been with the Pawnee Bill show for years, already; and, like the American Indian women, were merely left out of the records.

The total time the Georgians spent in the arena per show was only about fifteen or twenty minutes, but the crowds loved them.[76] According to a September 1901 article, "the feature that seemed to make the greatest impression, judging from the applause, was the riding of the Cossacks."[77] The riders seemed able to do *anything*; they could whirl a horse around in a circle on its hind legs several times without stopping, and they could ride forwards, backwards, dangling by one stirrup or from the pommel, or prostrate upon the horse's haunches.[78] "Prince" Luka was famous for doing a handstand on his horse's neck while at a full gallop.[79] Newspapers raved about their "dare-devil intrepidity," saying, "life and even limb are at stake every time they circle the Pawnee Bill arena." They added that they did all these death-defying feats with ease, with no frowns upon

[76] Georgian, *Cossacks, Indians, and Buffalo Bill,* 207.

[77] As quoted in Georgian, *Cossacks, Indians, and Buffalo Bill,* 208.

[78] *Omaha Daily Bee*, 1907; Georgian, *Cossacks, Indians, and Buffalo Bill,* 186-7.

[79] Georgian, *Cossacks, Indians, and Buffalo Bill,* 207.

their faces, "in apparent keen amusement."[80] With such an exciting, enthusiastic advertisement, it is hardly a wonder their audience received the Georgians so well.

It is easy to believe this "dare-devil intrepidity" led to accidents, injuries, and even death, however. In 1901, four of the five Georgians were hurt. Three broken ribs and a fractured collarbone hospitalized Alexis Georgian for several days. The lot's poor condition after a heavy rain caused a fall while another rider stood horseback, swinging his saber, and resulted in a "serious injury" (the route book does not say what kind of injury, exactly, and given the inclusion of a saber, the reader's imaginations can run wild).[81] A showman's' worst nightmare came true on October 27, 1907, in Houston, Texas, when a Georgian (probably thirty-five year old married, Jordon Schividadze, a Pawnee Bill cast member from 1905-7, as he does not appear again in any Wild West show record) was hospitalized and passed away.[82]

Cast members tended not to fear, however, and spent their free time having fun. In an attempt to escape the boredom of the August heat in 1900, the cast held a kangaroo court (a mock court in which the principles of justice are perverted), and the Georgians participated heartily. For example, "Chief" Alexis Georgian charged Nestor Khukhunaishvili with the heinous crime of having eaten twenty eggs for breakfast. An appalled jury of his peers found him thoroughly guilty and sentenced him to ten slaps, which the authorities immediately served.[83] "Prince" Luka Chkhartishvili was involved in

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[80] *Omaha Daily Bee,* 1907.

[81] Nicodemus and Wilson, *Season 1901*, 7, 9, 15.

[82] Georgian, *Cossacks, Indians, and Buffalo Bill,* 276.

[83] Ibid., 144-5.

the "The Lillie Paws," an eight-member golf team, and served as president in 1907.[84] Luka was also close friends with American Indian "Chief" Black Fox. One Georgian reported to a hometown newspaper upon his return, "We charmed the American women. One of them wished to marry one of us but our stupid friend preferred to marry a Gurian girl. Now he lives in Guria and has only beans for dinner."[85] Obviously, this Georgian would have made a difference choice, given the chance. As these stories illustrate, the Georgians had little trouble finding friends (and, perhaps, dalliances?) along the show route, despite the language barrier.

When the season ended in early November, the Georgians with both Buffalo Bill's and Pawnee Bill's Wild West shows returned to their apartment headquarters at 234 E. Broadway, New York City.[86] The men crowded into the apartment and swapped stories of accidents, bruises, bar fights, and women over wine and home-style cooking. Those remaining in New York for the winter wrote letters to loved ones those returning to Georgia would deliver.[87] While in America for the winter, the Georgians found seasonal work, such as performing for a week in January 1903 at the Austin & Stone Museum. They also attended social functions, such as the consecration of a new Russian Orthodox Church of St. Nicholas at 15 East 97th Street on November 23, 1902.[88]

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[84] Ibid., 274.

[85] Ibid., 180.

[86] Nicodemus and Wilson, *Season 1901*, 88; Georgian, *Cossacks, Indians, and Buffalo Bill,* 141, 146.

[87] Georgian, *Cossacks, Indians, and Buffalo Bill,* 146.

[88] Ibid., 176.

The Georgian showmen's lives could not go on so idyllically for long, however. In this case, politics in their home country were to blame. Russian Interior Minister Von Plehve told the czar that in order to divert attention from the revolution in Georgia, it might be a good idea to fight "a small victorious war" to create patriotic zeal. Therefore, in February 1904 Czar Nicholas II went to war with Japan. The war was largely the result of the two opposing countries' similar expansionist objectives. Russia claimed the area of Manchuria and demanded lumber concessions from Korea. Japan viewed this encroachment of their territories as a severe threat to their national security.[89] Alexis Georgian had been solidly against the czar's oppressive Russification program since 1893, and was not happy with the new war. He told an American newspaper in March 1904, "…war costs money, and the people will not stand the taxation."[90] His personal opposition, however, did nothing to sway American sentiment; America was firmly in favor of the Japanese. Riding the wave of public opinion, Pawnee Bill's show organizers installed a new act: a battle scene between the "Cossacks" and the Japanese. In this act, Luka and his men marched across the arena singing when suddenly the Japanese leaped from their ambush and fired upon them. Faced with such ferocity, the "Cossacks" fled in disorder.[91]

The Georgian men, already upset over being mistaken for "Cossacks," grew angrier about this new act; they were not used to being the bad guys. Instead of cheers when they entered the arena, the audience greeted them with hisses that ended only when

[89] Ibid., 149, 212.

[90] Ibid., 149, 216.

[91] Ibid., 229.

the Japanese cavalry rode in. A Missouri newspaper in 1904 reported "Prince" Luka could not understand why audiences cheered him one year and booed him the next. Pawnee Bill consoled him, saying the "jeers [were] from boys," and he and his organizers sincerely appreciated the Georgians' efforts in the show.[92] Interestingly, however, when it came time for the Georgians' own riding act, the audience still heartily cheered.[93] Apparently, even a foreign war could not detract from the Americans' amazement of Georgian riders' prowess in the saddle.

The Russo-Japanese war also caused trouble within the ranks of the cast. In 1905, a Japanese man, Haje Matchu, and an unidentifiable Georgian got in a fight in Leavenworth, Kansas, wherein the Georgian was badly injured. The article made light of this event, however, joking, "the peace conference at Portsmouth did not sign quite quick enough to stop" the fight.[94]

The Georgians faced another threat in the arena: copying cowboys. American cowboys severely threatened the Georgian act in 1906 when they began to learn and perform the distinctive "Cossack" trick of doing a headstand on the back of a running horse.[95] Indeed, Dee Brown argues in *The American West* that the "Cossack daredevil" influence led to today's trick riding. American cowboys were intrigued by these new

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[92] "Hisses for Show Cossacks," *St. Louis Republic*, 1904.

[93] Georgian, *Cossacks, Indians, and Buffalo Bill*, 263-4.

[94] "Might Have Been Avoided," *Minneapolis Journal*, 1905.

Note: the article does give the supposed name of the Georgian involved in the altercation. However, because of the likelihood that the Euro-American reporter could not understand and/or spell the man's correct name, the name given in the article ("F. Magervitch") does not even remotely resemble that of any Georgian listed in the 1905 route book cast list. Therefore, the author cannot attempt to guess correctly which rider was involved.

[95] Georgian, *Cossacks, Indians, and Buffalo Bill*, 263.

stunts, and sought to emulate them, adding variations as needed.[96] That is fine today, when descendants of Georgians can claim importance, but for those in the show this plagiarism was a death knell. As an act of self-preservation, "Prince" Luka, the rider most well-known for this particular stunt, devised a new twist. While riding at full tilt, he undid and discarded his saddle, and would do tricks with his saber while standing bareback.[97]

Beginning in 1900, Pawnee Bill began to include "eastern" ethnic groups to demonstrate their riding abilities and compare them to those of western cowboys and American Indians. One such group was the Georgians, misrepresented as Russian Cossacks. The Georgians' riding earned them many fans and therefore they were important to the economic success of the show. For the Georgians, employment in an American Wild West show was a lucrative economic opportunity. The czar's Russification program led to a civil war, which debilitated the country. By traveling with an American Wild West, however, these riders, both male and female, had the opportunity to earn more money than they ever could have at home and send it back to their families living in oppression on their farms. In 1906, Christine Tsintsadze became the first Georgian female rider in Pawnee Bill's Wild West; indeed, she is the only one on record. Likely, she was not truly the only female rider, but one of many who were merely victims of Victorian sensibilities. Because of the racism and sexism of the time, these show women were ignored and unlisted in the cast lists. By looking at these experiences through a gender study, we can see that, although Georgian men held a patriarchal view

[96] Ibid., 17.

[97] Ibid., 263.

of women, female Georgian riders emerged as strong characters in their own right—doing their own riding, traveling, and even earning their own substantial paychecks.

Conclusion

Gordon William "Pawnee Bill" Lillie was a Wild West showman. Inspired by his two years working as an interpreter for William Frederick "Buffalo Bill" Cody, Lillie created his own enterprise in 1888. Lillie's show toured the eastern seaboard every year from 1888-1913 and Europe in 1895. In 1909, Lillie joined his show with Cody's to create "Buffalo Bill's Wild West and Pawnee Bill's Great Far East," commonly called the Two Bills Show, which closed in 1913.

Wild West shows were the unofficial national entertainment of the United States and attempted to teach Euro-Americans about life on the western frontier. Scholars have written much regarding Buffalo Bill Cody and his show, the first of these enterprises, but largely neglect Pawnee Bill's show. We cannot understand Wild West shows unless we explore more than one incarnation of it and all of its participants—not only the Euro-American men, but men and women of ethnic minorities whom academic writing has greatly marginalized.

For three marginalized groups—Euro-American cowgirls, American Indian women, and Georgians—employment in Pawnee Bill's Historic Wild West equaled opportunity, whether social, cultural, or economic. "On the Road" set the stage, as it were, showing us the danger and logistics of the show, in addition to the imperialistic image of the American West it offered eastern audiences. We saw how the relative ease of railway travel meant that Cody and Lillie could spread their version of the American Western experience throughout the northeastern US. Railway travel, however, was also quite dangerous; the trains left people behind, train cars left the tracks, or equipment on

flat cars could fall. Once the performers arrived at their destination and entered, the danger did not end. Riders fell from their horses and broke bones, steers and bison escaped their handlers, and May Lillie even lost two fingers in a shooting accident.

"Have Split Skirt, Will Travel" offered a brief biography of May Lillie and discussed how she and the early Euro-American cowgirls pushed the boundaries of society by riding astride, wearing split skirts, and advocating new societal norms for women. The famous cowgirls of the day, like May Lillie, were able to broaden the definition of "respectable" Victorian behavior by accepting some gender norms and abandoning others. For example, May always wore full skirts and rode sidesaddle; this allowed her to advocate shooting as a pastime for women.

"Same Traditions, New Reasons," explored how American Indian women benefited from the show by offering a chance to maintain their culture. In a time of federal assimilationist policies, employment in the show allowed them to escape the reservation, keep their children out of the harsh boarding schools, and speak their own language. They also enjoyed the opportunity to travel and work for pay at tasks they had done for generations. The time-honored traditions of birth and death, friendship and rivalry, food preparation and beadwork all continued along the show route.

"'For Pure Fun in Emulation and Rivalry'" discussed the experiences of Georgian riders, both male and female. Because the Russian empire took over Georgia and enforced high taxes and small land allotments, Georgian peasants could not feed their families. Employment in the Wild West show allowed Georgian riders to earn money away from their war-torn homeland. For these groups, working in Pawnee Bill's Historic

Wild West was their “big break;” their chance to enter show business and make their lives a little better.

Epilogue

Imagine. The dust settles, the applause dies down, the lights are hazy in the dark. You leisurely walk your horse out of the arena gate. You're filthy and completely exhausted, but happy and proud. That was a show season well done, you think, as the crowded grandstands slowly empty…

… until you put your hand to your pocket and realize that your cell phone has fallen out. Your face freezes in a wide-eyed look of absolute horror. It had to have happened somewhere in the arena; you'll never find it. You hang your head in disgust, and angrily lope back to your truck. Forget it. Just *forget* it. All you want is to meet the rest of the cast at Sonic, and then get home to a hot shower.

Keeping the tradition alive, the Pawnee Bill Ranch and Museum, an Oklahoma Historical Society site in Pawnee, Oklahoma, recreates Pawnee Bill's Wild West Show the last three Saturdays every June. Although many things have to change, some never will. The all-Oklahoman cast is smaller, of course. They travel via trucks and trailers, not railways. Only a dedicated few Pawnee tribal members participate. There are no Georgians, but, true to their past, there are a few men misrepresented as Cossacks. No one will ever hear a cast member shout for help with a "Hey, Rube!" because he or she is being attacked by a trouble-making townie.

Yet, the feel of the show experience harkens back to the hey-days of Pawnee Bill's show. The cast parades through town, drumming up publicity. A medicine man attempts to sell snake oil before the show begins. The air is heavy with the smell of dirt, manure, and popcorn. There are still snake charmers in the sideshow tent, and cowboys

and cowgirls race around the arena. The Pawnee dancers fascinate the audience with their brightly colored, twirling regalia, and the trick roper hypnotizes those who watch closely.

The show organizers make every attempt to remain historically accurate. The acts in the show are the same, the current script is based on the original, and the costumes are period appropriate, with not a zipper to be found.

…and, for good reason, cell phones are forbidden in the arena.

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